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ABIGEL ROWE.

A CHRONICLE OF THE REGENCY.

BY

THE HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD,

AUTHOR OF "LADY GRIZEL," "MY LORDS OF STROGUE,"
"IN HER MAJESTY'S KEEPING," ETC.

"Chaque age a son esprit, ses plaisirs, et ses mœurs."

BOILEAU.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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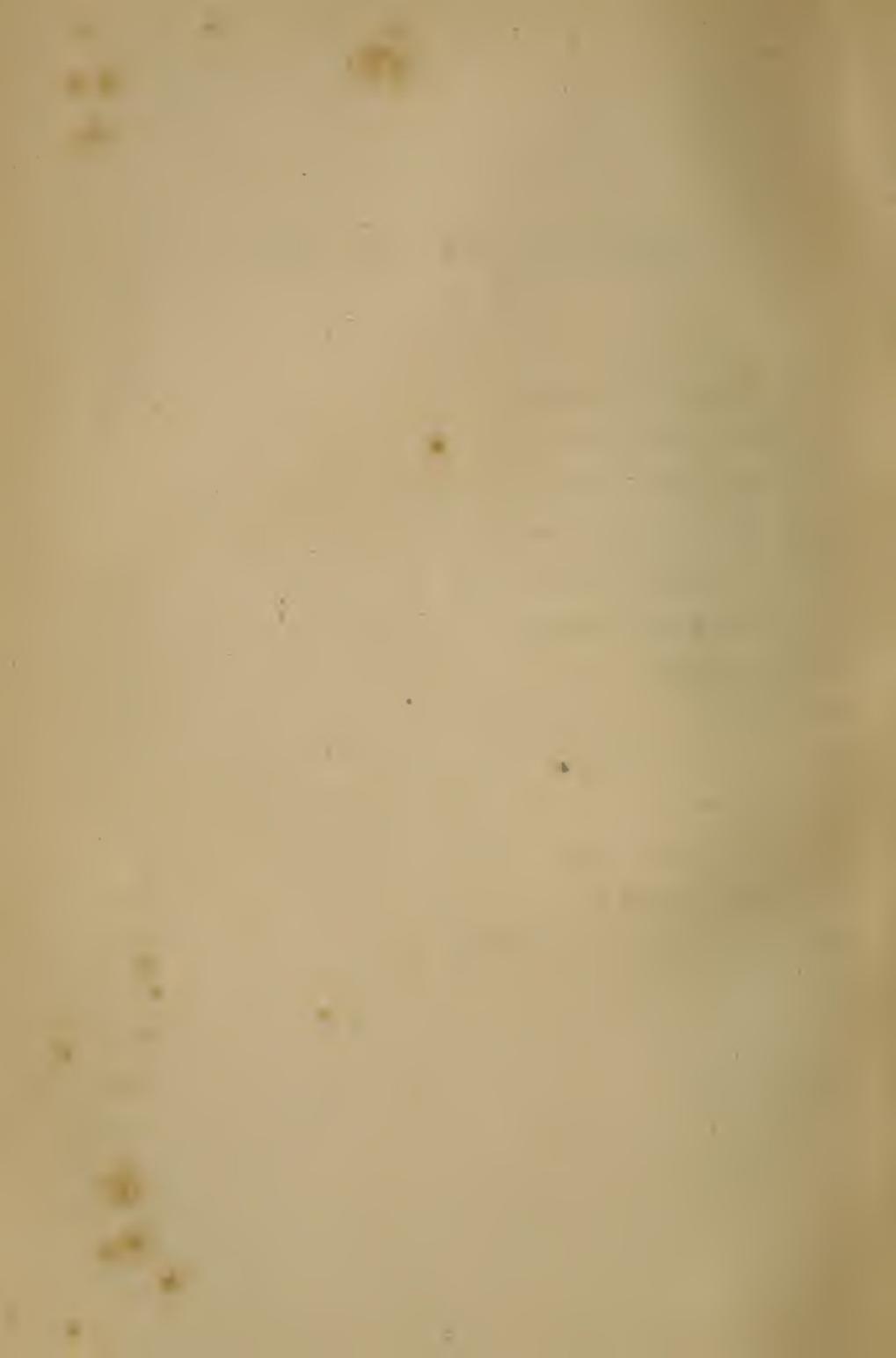
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A BIGEL ROWE.

CHAPTER I.

MISS ROWE DIGS ALONE.

THE new year arrived in a motley coat, a thing of shreds and patches, black and white and grey and green, the hue of hope; even more like a harlequin suit than is usually the robe of the deceitful elf who comes to us all promises, and limps away dripping with tears.

The rioting became so serious in the metropolis that ministers, their houses being wrecked, were awakened to the necessity of attending to the wishes of the people. Committees of inquiry were appointed; the question of daily bread duly discussed, with the result that a Corn Bill was brought in, fixing the price of wheat at eighty shillings a quarter, and passed on the 10th of March, 1815, despite the frantic opposition of the Whigs indoors and out, and the prophetic denunciations of perspiring demagogues.

The Prince was said never to have looked so well for years as in the midst of the general hubbub of this spring. Was it the effect of a newly imagined jasey of a deeper shade of brown? Or was it in consequence of secret satisfaction, in that the mob were taking to assaults on M.P.'s instead of on him? No. It was something much more important than riots, or even jaseys, that caused his cheek to bloom into natural pinkness, his chin to dimple as in youth.

SHE was gone! The Dreadful Woman was safe across the Channel, with the blessed silvery streak between! The aching molar was out. The Prince of Wales—the first time for years—could breathe freely, could drive anywhere without a constant dread of perceiving a Blowsalinda prancing round the corner. Was that not enough to make him gay? But before delicious daydreams were realized there had been many a slip and instant of agony. The molar was deep-rooted, and took a deal of pulling out. Whitbread tried with all his might to keep the Princess in England; but she was so bent on freedom, that no argument could move her. Indeed, she changed her line of reasoning with an abruptness which, even in her, was disconcerting. “I cannot bear,” she wrote to Whitbread, “to be a means to create disturbance.” This was something sweetly fresh, that engaged by its novelty. To imploring Charlotte she wrote, “My

dear, we cannot be of the smallest use to each other ; why make pretence ? There is only one thing to be done, and I doot. Parliament votes me money. If I refuse, they say, What de devil does de woman want ? We cannot make her husband like her, or de Queen receive her ; so we give her a sufficient sum to maintain her rank elsewhere.” *

And so she absolutely went at last ; and the stormy element being removed from Court, things took a tranquil turn ; and the Prince gave charming *parties fines* to celebrate the “ happy event,” just as if it had been a christening.

The new *régime* brought little satisfaction to poor Charlotte, who felt herself utterly neglected, and pined and lost her health, as all the tendrils of her warm affections were frosted and severed. She had no companion of her own age and sex now. Crauford Lodge was damp—a cool grot embowered in thick trees. Harsh granny pounced down from the Castle hard by and lectured her ; the army of frumps and fograms exasperated her. No doubt she was unduly forward, and needed a judicious system of repression ; but the rule under which she lived now was one of iron, suited rather to a felon than to a self-willed damsel. For a while she bore her fate with patience, but at last humbled herself so far as to apply to her indifferent father for a relaxation of discipline. His

* This letter is authentic.

own burthen being lightened, he looked kindly on her petition. She might come to London now and then, even go once a week to a play or opera ; but her companions henceforth were to be selected with extremest care, and rash flittings in hackney coaches rendered impossible. The entrance to Warwick House towards the lane was secured with bars. The only entrance into the virginal retreat was through the courtyard of Carlton House, from whose windows all who came and went might be noted down and criticized. It was given out that when the heiress presumptive appeared in the royal box, no one was to applaud. She was never to take the air in an open carriage. Two attendant ladies and General Garth were to occupy the other seats of the vehicle. The whole thing became so ridiculous, that the General begged permission to ride on horseback, in order to appear less like a warder borrowed from a house of correction.

Meanwhile affairs abroad progressed—up to a certain point—most satisfactorily. The magnificent reception of the Allies in London had been followed by a gathering of bigwigs at Vienna. Reversing the usually accepted arrangement, pleasure came first, and business afterwards. All the pomp of European diplomacy was busied in the Congress—snipping the map of Europe, and distributing provinces with inch-rule and scissors—when an explosion took place which scattered the arbitrators. While the

princes and envoys of the showy conclave were twisting their rope of sand, the news arrived that the eagle had left his cage, that the curse of mankind had put himself at the head of an army, that he had shown so little consideration for the feelings of the bigwigs as to perch once more upon the throne of France. As the great Napoleon placed his foot upon French soil, he remarked, "Voilà le Congrès dissout;" and it was so. But birds who leave their cages must be caught again. The world beheld the unparalleled spectacle of a vast confederacy in arms against a single individual. Diplomacy vanished, war reappeared upon the scene, and England, trusting no more to the slippery policy of a Tallyrand or a Metternich, boldly took that lead in the ensuing contest which was hers by right of previous action. When he left Elba the fortunes of Bonaparte were by no means desperate. His fate hung upon the possibility of warding off hostilities until he should have time to organize. Delay might have saved him, but Lords Castlereagh and Wellington—emissaries of destiny—decided otherwise. The victory at Waterloo finished the struggle at a blow.

As may be conceived, London went mad again with joy. It had been awful to think that, after all the misery the people had endured already in consequence of protracted difficulties on the Continent, a new war was to be inaugurated, that might drag on for years,

as the previous one had done; and the suddenness with which gathering clouds had been dispersed produced a feeling of intense relief. Everybody shook hands and drank wine with everybody else. The metropolis was illuminated. Drawing-rooms were held and balls given; and in the universal expansion of soul and distribution of comforting sops, Charlotte, the recluse, was a gainer. She accompanied the Queen to Brighton, danced under the golden dragons in the ballroom of the Pavilion like any other girl, was even allowed to walk on the Steine, and, growing juvenile, took to perambulating the shores and romantic corners of Rottingdean in the company of a fine young man. Shall we now digress and enter on a disquisition concerning the human heart and the elasticity of youth, which will rebound and beat with idiotic ardour the moment the chilling hand of repression is removed? No; we will refrain. Suffice it to observe, that under the reviving influence of sighs and soft nothings, breathed by a handsome gentleman, Charlotte's cheek grew rosy as of yore, and her gay laughter echoed along the beach, as though she had never been a prisoner. She looked upon Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, and thought his companionship delightful. He was a Waterloo hero, and every one was building altars before the victors of that immortal fight. "They were modern Hotspurs!" cried Madam Grundy, as she gathered them under her wing.

These coffee-house cornets, morocco-booted bucks, were as impatient as their horses, and thought no more of running their noses into fire than the moth that dances round the candle. The dear silly fellows cantered after the foe with as highbred an *aplomb* as they would use in pursuing a fine woman in the Park with the chance of a brother's bullet ; they took an eagle as quietly as a pinch of rappee, and upset an enemy as carelessly as they would floor a watchman or kick a sheriff's officer downstairs. Madam G. was charmed that the curled darlings—lords of acres, bearers of ancient names—should hide indomitable courage under an amusing affectation of effeminacy.

Charlotte did not like sham effeminacy, but she admired courage, and, like many an ardent and headstrong female, longed to be mastered. In the tall and handsome Leopold she recognized her master, and loved him. No more tantrums and vinegar discussions as with the snipe-legged Orange. She gibed at Leopold, and played him hoyden tricks, as was her nature to do ; but when he looked injured or sentimental, she was overcome with woe, made pretty *moues* of contrition. He corrected her sententiously, like a governess ; but, dear me, what a difference it makes as to who delivers the sermons ! When the reverend Ezekiel preaches, you, madam, drink in each prosy word (while others yawn), thinking that never did such pearls of wisdom drop from human

tongue ; and all the time he is prating dreary nasal platitudes. If those who love us did not don coloured glasses, where should you and I be ? Prophets, we are told, are unhonoured in their own country. Well, true prophets are scarce. Let us, the counterfeit, rejoice and be exceeding glad that our mothers, maiden aunts, should think their fowl is turkey when it is only goose. In the charmed eyes of Charlotte, Leopold was nothing less grand than a peacock. She went out of her way to perform hoydenisms for the purpose of being reproved. The dull-eyed, pallid girl with a brown-paper complexion, and too redundant a figure for her age, became quite pretty again, with a subdued and reticent manner, that sat well on an heiress presumptive ; and corkscrew-visaged granny was delighted with her success, forgetful that it was to interesting Leopold, and not to her, that was due the welcome change.

With Charlotte, out of sight was not out of mind. All these events were duly recorded in folios of blotted and smeared manuscript, and transmitted by post to Battle Magna. At one moment the romantic Princess declared that meditation and an early death was the best of futures ; that the only comfortable sphere was somewhere in ether, where spirits hover unceasingly, like the cherub who visited St. Theresa and flew about because unable to sit. Hours of idleness were spent in transcribing poesy, bits from Lord

Byron's last effusion, wherein Corsairs and Giaours frowned upon mankind and disgorged a godlike discontent. Then came a change. This poor abused mass of rubbish, yclept a planet, had its good points. Humanity was piebald, not completely black. There were hopes for it in a dim future. There was one that had recently come under her notice, who was entrancingly superior to everybody else, whose deportment showed to what extent of improved condition a baser essence might some day aspire. He was slim, olive-complexioned, with a long nose, and brows just like the Corsair, and he talked like a book. Nay, he was the living embodiment of that enchanting creation Manfred. If only Abigel could see and be privileged to listen, etc., after the fashion of damsels who are in love.

At another time Abigel would have laughed at all this and have been immensely amused, but her heart was too sick for laughter, and she read all the outpourings of her friend with an accompanying commentary of sniffs. Human love, faith—pooh ! There was no such thing. Some people didn't pretend to any such foolishness, and theirs was the wiser part. Others glibly chattered and looked unutterable devotion, and swore oaths and vowed vows with such a semblance of genuineness as to deceive and undo the unwary. But they were brazen pots emitting sound, empty within. Love ? Ha, ha ! Faith ?

Ha, ha, ha ! At the mere consideration of the inflated Bugaboos, Abigel clasped her hands behind her shapely head and laughed an ugly laugh, which hurt her lips and seared her breast—an acid cachinnation.

Who should be a judge, if she were not ? That she elected to give her energies to Leoline was nothing. It concerned only herself, the waif, and she looked for no reward beyond a pleased consciousness of merit and a pale satisfaction in that an appointed task was being carried out as thoroughly as circumstances permitted, if not successfully. But what was to be said about the great hulking fellow who had entangled her in a sort of promise, and on whom, in consequence of his apparent single-mindedness, she was actually beginning to look with a species of something or other that was not quite love ? There had seemed something so unutterably tender in the unquestioning abnegation of the athlete, who, out of pure, unadulterated affection for an unworthy object, had quietly laid by his cherished ambitions, and occupied himself with a quest in which he could have no individual interest. Is not Jacob's servitude for Laban's daughter a touching history ? Well, the self-sacrifice of Cyrus was more heroic, because, for the sake of his love—who appreciated it, though she did not tell him so—he promised altogether and for ever to bury his ambition. 'Twas not a case of serving for awhile, then resuming your place and

being master. Jacob, I dare say, made Rachel pay for it, twitted her for all he had undergone, and when she asked for a new yashmak snapped his fingers.

Cy's case was different from the patriarch's. He was never to be master, so far as the resumption of ambitious attempts were concerned. Like a faithful and obedient vassal, he was to do what he was bid, and bark or wag his tail in obedience to a warning gesture. All this being arranged to the satisfaction of all parties, was it not outrageous that all of a sudden, without warning, he should put off his devotion as he might a spencer, his obedience like a waist-coat, and walk calmly away in shirt and breeches? Was it not insulting, disgraceful, abominable, double-faced—too horrid for words to picture? Who had asked him to express so much—to be so glib in promises? It was horrible to be thus overreached—to feel that you have been made a fool of; that you have obligingly condescended to accept professed service as a favour to the professor, just to save him from suicide, and that he has then turned round with a grimace and a derisive guffaw.

I will draw a veil over Abigel's behaviour, after the abrupt departure of her cousin for the second time. I am afraid she was a coquette, and could appreciate the flattering attentions of dangling swains, and be resentful when they set themselves free. It must be confessed, too, that a foreboding had come upon her of the

difficulty of the quest. The maid of Domrémy considered herself called, and marched straight to the goal in triumph. What if she had been repulsed, had met with insuperable difficulties ? Would she not have been a laughing-stock, degraded in her own conceit ; have gone back to her village to be jibed at by chawbacons ? To attempt a task and succeed is one thing ; to fail is another. An inkling of a possibility had once or twice dawned on Miss Rowe latterly, that the missing links in the chain would never be found ; that the peerage of Northallerton would never be revived ; that Leo was right to be so cool about it, since he was doomed to die in the obscurity which had been his birthright. In event of failure, how would she herself be affected ? Pentecost, in the nature of things, was not long for this world. So soon as she was gone, Lord Osmington would give free vent to his malice, and eject her niece. What would become of her ? Was she to run to Charlotte and say, “Here I am, a destitute orphan, who has made a fool of herself. Provide for me” ? Certainly not. Miss Rowe was as proud as any of the blue-blooded, and would perish first. If Leo would say, “You have lost your protector for my sake, come to my arms ! Love and poesy and a crust !”—At this juncture in her self-communing, Miss Rowe passed trembling fingers over her hot cheeks and burst into tears. Would that phenomenon never be grilled—never give up kicking ? Poesy and the crust

being altogether out of the question, there remained the *pis-aller*. A modest farm and Cyrus. Why not, after all? That might be possible a long time hence, when the phenomenon was dead and the quest abandoned; a fate to be accepted with benignant condescension and Christian resignation. But now, Jacob, after only a few weeks, was grown weary of his service! Fickle, inconstant monster! Abandoning the solution of a riddle which grew more and more puzzling, he had gone back, without even asking permission, to his vulgar fisticuffs—after showing such unexpected acumen, too—and had left Ariadne to muddle her brains alone. Abigel was furiously indignant against the deserter; for how was she to be sure that he had only deserted—that he had not gone over to the enemy as on a previous occasion? It was a mercy, though, that he had no letter to take with him. Abigel made another discovery, but fortunately after the departure of the pugilist.

The creeping months had crawled slowly. She was wandering listlessly in the crumbling apartments, wondering whether any one would answer the advertisement; whether any one yet lived who could answer it; whether the monument had not been broken up and used in the restoration of the church. The gossip of Kimpton's friend seemed to point to some other method of destroying it. There had been no mural alterations at the manor-house. Its tumbledown

condition was proof enough of that. What, then, could have become of the slab, after it had been carried in green baize like a bagatelle table? Having nothing else to do, and being afflicted with tablet on the brain, Miss Rowe began systematically at the top of the eastern turret, and rummaged with conscientious precision. The owls and bats that had dwelt there so long undisturbed wheeled round her head with discordant outcries. Why could this restless girl not leave them in peace, without stirring all that dust? The breath of time and of decay had blasted all in those upper chambers. The piles of lumber littered down, falling to pieces at a touch. Not a vestige of a freestone tablet was to be found. How unlikely that it should! Probably it had been cast into the brawling Fosse, where trout had studied the precious words, ere the trickling water had effaced them.

It is a hard thing for an energetic mind to remain fallow. If Miss Rowe wandered in the village, the hags would run out of their burrow and cackling crave for news. Madam Higgs would pipe shrilly of the reward she was to have for valuable information. Sally Scraggs would drop hints of whiskey. The blacksmith would look up from his work inquiringly. She felt in some sort an impostor, for there was no news or likelihood of any. How long ago it seemed since the advertisement was penned! When you talk

a matter over with another you seem to be making progress, or may cheat yourself into a belief that you are; but in solitude that is impossible. There was no progress, or possibility of making any.

Having continued the systematic search from floor to floor, Abigel found herself poking about again in the library. Just as if she did not know by heart every paper in Lady Olivia's chest; every medicine phial in the ebony cabinet.

Listlessly she ransacked every drawer, for there was nothing else to do. There were the old bobbins—how she hated bobbins—the old-fashioned silk racks, with the silks of many hues employed in those astonishing specimens of tambour-work that had grown old and biliary in the drawing-room. That little cabinet with plaques of lapis lazuli! Vainly she had tried her fingers once before on its carefully adjusted doors. Why, they flew open now when she shook it! Strange! More documents, old bills, receipts, a bundle of recipes for currant wine and other secrets of housewifery. With a palpitating bosom she turned them over. If by chance—oh, if by chance— Yet, no; 'twas vain to expect to find anything of importance. The letters which were given to Lord Osmington by Cyrus—the double-dyed traitor, who could calmly jilt his love and be false to his promised word—had been placed where they were found by Olivia, who justly gauged the faithlessness

of man. There was no chance of hitting upon any more. She must not cheat herself by such a hope. Heavens ! what was this ? A letter on yellow paper. Abigel's heart beat so wildly that she scarce could breathe, her eyes swam, and she was compelled to brush the tears from them ere she could read. Signed "James Jarvis !" Absolutely James Jarvis ! To his brother Archibald, as the other one had been. He seemed always to have been writing to brother Archibald, who, after all, never did aught for him. In literal earnest he had asked for bread, and been given a stone. What could the letter contain ? The name so anxiously sought for ? Alack, no ! But it was interesting and important. Odd that there should be no mention of such a document in the diary. It complained, much in the same strain as the one destroyed, of poverty ; begged for alms to buy clothes for a third child, and to help him to remove his family to England (he did remove his family to England, then !) ; and ended by saying that little Miles and Dorcas were growing like their uncle.

Miles and Dorcas ! Miles ! Miles was the missing name. How provoking that he should not have mentioned the place to which he intended to remove his family ! No need to seek out the monument now, and yet—something might be gleaned from it as to where the family had settled. Archibald must have been a hard man—harder than she supposed—not to

have established James on a proper footing when he migrated back to England. Perhaps not so. It must not be forgotten that though accused of murder, the fugitive was never tried. Was not that sufficient reason for continued concealment ?

Miles Jarvis ! With a feeling of deep thankfulness in that patience was being rewarded, and that lost links were dropping one by one into her hand, Miss Rowe put the document carefully away in a little casket, with the diary and marriage lines and other precious things, and sat down to write to Leoline.

That young gentleman lingered for a few months longer in England, through the agency of Madam Cotton, who observed to the Princess, “ What is the use of offering rewards for a special object if the man chiefly concerned is gadding who knows whither ? If no answer is vouchsafed, let him join us in six months’ time, when we proceed to Italy.”

The Princess, delighted as she was to be departing, acquiesced at once. “ Mon ami ! ” she said, “ join me a real undoubted earl, and so I will have one of the peerage left to lean upon ! ”

She bade farewell to the *protégé* much as she had parted from her daughter, devoured by a longing for liberty. Madam Ambrosia and Lady Charlotte Campbell were the only old friends whom she took with her, though Sir William Gell, Monk Lewis, and others dutifully saw her off.

Abigel was in high delight over the new clue that she had found, and was writing to Leoline, bidding him not despair, but be of good cheer, when a packet arrived from Charlotte, wherein she mentioned that London was agog about the great prize-fight. What prize-fight? The coming contest between the Sprig of Myrtle and the Pink of Bow. For Auld Lang Syne she, the writer, had actually hazarded some little bets upon the Sprig with uncles York and Sussex. Would not Abby come up to see old friends and witness her cousin's victory?

Miss Rowe flung the invitation on the floor, and, laying her head on the table, sobbed bitterly.

CHAPTER II.

THE TUG OF WAR.

THE great and long-expected and so frequently deferred day dawned at last, which was to see an honest encounter between the Pink of Bow and Sprig of Myrtle, so as to set the vexed question at rest for ever as to which was the better man. A week before the day fixed upon, a sparring match was held at the Fives-courts by the flickering light of oil lamps, that amateurs might gather a hint or two about the men on whom they had staked their money, the takings at the door being set aside as consolation-stakes for the loser in the grand battle. Lord Osmington made no secret of his partiality for Caleb. With an unnecessary garnish of expletives, he swore he was a picture, a perfect animal, devoid of blemish; and so great was the influence of the President of the club over less-exalted Corinthians, that popular opinion followed his dictum, and the betting remained steady at seven to four on the Pink. But there was a look

of calm complacency on the visages of Cy and Cribb that was not without its effect on the knowing ones. Thomas might be prejudiced in favour of his friend ; but he was long-headed, and knew what he was about. Moreover, Gentleman Jackson and old Joe Ward, who were not so biassed, appeared hopeful. Although they knew better than to roar and howl and blaspheme, as Mendoza's faction did, they showed no fear for the honour of the Bristol school ; and a fact leaked out which spoke volumes, namely, that Jackson, the prudent, had borrowed fifty pounds for the purpose of risking it on Cyrus.

Caleb Rann was incapable of comprehending the quiet attitude of his antagonist. With him to be confident was to be noisy. Although resolved to behave himself to the best of his powers and wear a curb, he could not help bragging. The temptation to cut a dash was more than nature could withstand. He showed himself on the "Grand Strut" in the Park in garb of wondrous cut and hue ; made believe to consider the Sprig beneath his notice ; even sent an undertaker to the Lion in the Borough Market, out of bravado, to measure Mr. Smalley for a coffin.

"Brag's a good dog, but Holdfast's a better," was Cribb's remark over this bit of facetiousness ; for no good ever came of gasconading.

"For all your bounce," said old Joe Ward, "I

know a little cove, not above nine stone, who'd shut you up in a jiffey."

The lights became blue with blasphemy (Ward and Caleb chanced to have met at a lushing crib), as the Pink insisted upon knowing who the little cove was, that he might devour him, bones, body, and breeches.

"The little cove," returned the veteran, slyly, "sits in Bow Street; and if you give me any nonsense, I'll give you a chance of seeing what he can do."

"Whatever was Mendoza about," exclaimed Gentleman Jackson, "to allow his candidate to play such antics?"

That worthy, as it happened, was only too thankful that his restive charge should be satisfied with a harmless whisking of the tail. He was docile in the matter of diet—tolerably so—was in first-rate condition, and the Hebrews were cockahoop accordingly. There was deep and animated discussion as to where the merry business was to take place. Old Ward was for Kit's Cot House in Berks, a verdant and convenient spot; but then the Berkshire magistrates had set their faces of late against pugilistic contests, and were not likely to waive objections where the notoriously rowdy Rann was concerned. It was rather a blow to the amateurs when the Grand Signor declined to attend. The meeting with Sheridan had given him a turn, and disgusted him with the past. My lady Hertford, too, disapproved of the Fancy, and

took her royal friend to ruralize at the Pavilion to avoid the solicitations of Vere. Her ladyship, indeed, preached propriety after the fashion of a Maintenon, and deplored, with many head-shakings, that dear Yarmouth should patronize boxers.

It was finally decided that the battle should take place at Kingston, and many, taking advantage of the glorious July sunshine, resolved to make the pilgrimage by water. So, from an early hour, the Thames was as crowded with boats as if some aquatic *fête* was on hand; while as for the road, it was one long stream of vehicles of every shape and colour. And what spirits all were in! What a bandying of rough jape and broad rejoinder! Even Lord Osmington, who had settled to drive down his man in a phaeton, deigned to enter into the spirit of the scene. The curricle of an amateur, who had presumed to take the lead, broke down in front of him, and there was a general jeer of derision from costard-mongers and others in that he should miss the fun. "No matter," laughed the gentleman. "My upper benjamin is thick and heavy; will your lordship let me place it in your phaeton?"

"Certainly; throw it up. But how will you get it again?"

"Quite easily, my lord, and many thanks," returned the dandy; "for, with your kind permission, I mean to go inside it."

Think not that the beauteous sex disdained to grace the scene, although 'twas to look upon a mannish sport. Never was such an ambulating flowery *parterre*. Miss Sarah Hurley, the Cyprian (better known as "Sall of the Spice Islands"), was present in a pony chaise, wearing a new bonnet sprouting with dahlias; fresh from threshing hemp at Bridewell. And with her Bet Beasley, the rag wench; and Poll Chapman, the cinder-sifter, so celebrated for running in a smock. The gipsy queen, too, of the flue-fakers was just behind in a donkey-tandem, escorted by a bodyguard of thin-legged gentry of the forked-radish pattern, kiddily togged. And bogle-eyed Jem, of course, on his barrow; and dirty Suke; and chaffing Peter, the dust-man's oracle. And round the corner of the Pig and Tinder box—known to the outer world as the Elephant and Castle—was assembled a goodly host of excellent company, enjoying a shove in the mouth. Sam Shanks, who is called by pals the "Duke of Limbs," was there, passing round, with genial liberality, a pot of heavy wet for the delectation of Ned Trollop, the tripe man, and Tim Ferret, the scavenger, and their ladies and grown-up daughters; while Slippery Kate, the oyster-vendor, resplendent in best clothes, was standing glasses of daffy with the manner of a real duchess. It is needless to say that the other ranks of society were equally well represented. The Dukes

of York and Sussex were toolled down on my lord Yarmouth's private coach; while a foreign prince or two were piloted by Alvanley.

Cy, by advice of the sagacious Champion, had taken up his quarters at the Stag of Kingston three days previous to the important date, not wishing to spoil the good effects of country air by breathing the polluted atmosphere of London. The Stag had a right to rear its horns on high; for never since its foundation stone was laid had it taken in finer company. Squires from the southern counties were present by the score. The best beds were aired for his Grace of Beaufort and my lord Worcester; while Lord Sefton and Prince Esterhazy had to be content with shakedowns, like ordinary untitled mortals.

The spot chosen for the *rencontre* was a field between Kingston and Thames Ditton, and there a ring was formed of thirty feet diameter. A tiny tent was erected for each hero, after the fashion of the knights of old; but instead of a shield hanging outside, a little flag was hoisted, made of coloured silk. Mendoza and Seroggins appeared to pick up Rann, each armed with a sponge and bladder of rum-and-water; while for Cyrus, Randal and Spring were nominated seconds, with Cribb as referee. And a splendid figure was that last-named gentleman, in a brand-new cutaway of palest snuff colour, a drab castor turned up with scarlet; the glittering belt

about his waist ornamented with a couple of silver fists in front, flanked by large circular plates.

Before the commencement of operations the Champion addressed the seconds, bidding them show that the strictures which it was unhappily beginning to be the fashion to cast upon the noble art, were mendacious and unjust. "Prove yourselves gentlemen," he said. "On the men setting-to, retire to your corners decently; and when time is called, bring 'em quick to the scratch. No shabby tricks, and don't employ bad language, or make grimaces at your opponents." This was a long speech for Mr. Cribb, and required a flash of lightning to wash it down.

What is that yell of applause—that rush and waving of hats and handkerchiefs? It is my lord Osmington with the favourite, who takes his fogle from his neck and flourishes it round his head.

"He's a game one is the Pink of Bow," shouts an enthusiast, "his complexion milk and roses; a hardish nut to crack! Seven to four on the Pink!"

"Where lurks the Sprig of Myrtle?" bawls an adherent of the rival candidate. "What means this diffidence, as if he was here against his will? Does he feel that his chance is a poor one? It really does seem as if he were showing the white feather."

"No fear," retorts indignant Ward. "He'll be up when wanted."

"He is in his tent," explains the Champion, "to

avoid the July sun; but as fit as a fiddle for all that."

"In his tent? What a queer fancy! Instead of arriving in state, surrounded by swells, to creep hither unawares! Show your mug! Don't be ashamed of it!" roars an admirer. "Come out, and let us look at you."

With calm deliberation the Sprig issued from his tent, and stepped, like another Achilles, on to the turf of slaughter. The odds on the Pink were seven to three, till Cyrus, entering the ring, tossed off his coat and threw his hat within the ropes. His form, his modest deportment, and his dress occasioned a buzz of approval. He wore laced boots, a pair of white doeskin breeches, and silk stockings, tied at the knee with knots of yellow ribbon, carrying each a sprig of myrtle. A broad web-band was round his waist, with three buckles to it—a tip from his trainer, who always wore one. He showed a firmness of flesh, clear and speckless, which proved nothing to have been omitted to bring him to the apex of his powers; and people began to whisper that the Champion was a leery covey, cunning as to keeping matters dark; one who knew well what he was about.

A few seconds later, the Pink stood opposite, with a self-satisfied smirk; and the knowing ones, seeing the two stripped together for the first time by light of day, declared that the latter was overtrained; for to

the experienced eye the insertion of one muscle into another was too plainly visible. It might savour of hypercriticism, but he seemed to be fined down too much ; and the doubtful impression produced by contrast with his rival was not improved by the circumstance that when he threw his hat into the ring, it was caught by the wind and blown out again —a bad omen. Nevertheless, he was a fine-looking fellow in his dark cinnamon breeches and brown stockings and brilliant pink fogle bound about his waist ; and Mendoza might well be proud of him. So bumptious was he, that he tried to make a speech—indecorous, unprecedented proceeding—which had to be nipped in the bud. Since the last encounter, he averred, he had learnt a thing or two, which he would display before an hour was out for the gratification of Corinthians.

“ Two may improve in science,” rebuked the Champion. “ Swaggerers and swashbucklers are worthy of contempt. Hold your tongue, and get to business.”

Both peeled so well that the match looked extremely promising ; for 'twould have been hard to find two more magnificently muscular specimens of the fistic gladiator, a pair more perfect in health and condition. Urged thereto by Gentleman Jackson, they cordially shook hands, expressing a hope that the best man might win ; and as Caleb took his place, he was sorely exercised as to his rival. The white feather

was not visible now. What did he mean by looking so confident? Was he a coward, taking heart of grace because he could not help himself; or did that reserved manner of his denote a certainty of victory?

At setting-to, both sought to avoid first play, squaring at one another, with bodies well thrown back, watching the minutest movement of each other's iris. The length of Cy's arms, kept well in front, made him exceedingly difficult to touch, and the stillness was intense as the combatants moved cautiously to and fro without striking. Presently Caleb, growing tired of this, hit straight for the lobe of the liver; but Cy leapt nimbly back two or three feet in the Belcher style, and won a burst of applause for his lightness. Several minutes of artful sparring followed, and the Pink began to be certain that he had underrated his rival's powers as well as his determination. He was vastly improved in science—no doubt of it—not to be caught with chaff. That inscrutable manner of his was mighty queer, though. During the first few rounds nothing special happened, and a few murmured that this was science run to seed; but these were speedily hushed down. Though both commenced to pipe a little, they stood firm; yet the betting showed signs of changing; for the back of the Pink was damp, while the entire skin of the Sprig was suffused with a ruddy glow. Taking the hint, the speculations of the Fancy were squared accord-

ingly, and Lord Osmington cursed under his breath, and called his favourite names.

"Don't be all night!" exclaimed Miss Sarah Hurley. "Give him one on the pimple!"

"Ay!" cried her friend Poll, the cinder-sifter. "It's awful slow. A good chatterbox hit now—summat to derange the attic!"

"Look alive!" chorused the impatient ladies.

That the Queen of Beauty should bestow the guerdon on a successful knight is becoming; that she should bellow slang in a gin voice, and create a diversion from important matters, is not. The Corinthians determined then and there that from lovely woman, at all events, there should be no unseemly interruption. I regret to chronicle that Sall of the Spice Islands was incontinently dragged out of her chariot and placed astride of a patient ass that, unyoked from harness, was innocently browsing on savoury thistles, the which aggrieved and startled quadruped flung up his hoofs and galloped off, with the delinquent clinging about his neck, bawling for mercy. Stern lessons are sometimes necessary as examples for the body politic. All agreed that the punishment was deserved, and so none assisted the ill-used fair, who in due course was borne, with dahlias wildly waving, to the end of the field, and shot on to a bed of nettles.

Caleb made play; but Cyrus stopped him in good

style, returning with his left but short. The latter seemed now to think that it was time for something more lively; so he commenced a vigorous assault, and, closing gradually up, kept his adversary employed to the full, while, like a skilful tactician, he was stealing imperceptibly closer and closer. When he deemed his distance sufficiently well measured, he feinted with his left, and landed a tremendous blow over Caleb's eye, cutting him to the bone, drawing the blood in a torrent, and knocking him clean off his legs. Thus early in the contest were decided two important points, namely, first blood and first knock-down blow. Loud shouting arose among the spectators. Mendoza looked glum; Cribb rubbed his hands; Lord Osmington ground his teeth; Lord Sefton cried "Hooray!" and the betting changed to even.

The fearful force of that sledge-hammer blow showed its effect on Caleb, who came to the scratch looking confused, his eyes blinking strangely, the crimson stream making fantastic shapes about his face and body. He muttered something incoherent, and came on. Cyrus was not one to let slip an advantage fairly earned, but vigorously pressed forward to improve his success. He landed a stinging hit on Caleb's nob; but, his foot slipping, was late in getting off, and received a counter-hit. The men caught hold, Lancashire fashion, and, after a

tremendous tussle, with throbbing veins and sinews like cords, Cyrus went down undermost. Lord Osmington yelled like a maniac, “Go it, Rann ! Go it, Pink of Bow ! The day will be yours yet ; if not, ’twill be the worse for you.” And Cyrus, as he came up to time, thought inwardly, “Strange that he should be so inveterate ! He’d like me to be left dead upon the field !” The excitement became uproar. Encouraged by his patron’s voice, lashed by ominous murmurs, Caleb came up fiercely, and led off at Cy. Touching him lightly, he got away from the return, and swiftly put in his right, catching Cyrus on the ribs. The latter was countered, and Rann, then jumping in, landed a heavy nobber. Some sharp exchanges took place, and both went down at the close, Caleb looking haggard and anxious. Betting remained even ; but Rann was still most asked for.

“Splendid ! magnificent !” roared his Grace of Beaufort, who forgot his gout and his dignity, and danced with eagerness upon the sward. “Your lordship should look blue !” he gibed at Vere. “T’other’s as fit as ever ; your man’s growing silly.”

Indeed, there was more than enough to make the Pink look foolish. He had boasted overmuch and swaggered prodigiously ; had pitied his patrons in that the match was too uneven to provide real sport ; now he was steadily getting the worst of it, though both stood arm to arm with conspicuous gallantry, neither

as yet conceding an inch of contested ground. Caleb came up, bleeding badly from the face; Cyrus was blowing like a cow in a clover field. Might the tables be turned yet? Cyrus went straight for his man, closed in, and got his head in chancery, intending to fib him well; but Caleb, in desperation, seized Cyrus by the hand, and, with a clever twist, threw his opponent heavily. Did ever such a yelling and screeching issue before from human throats? Men and women crushed forward and buffeted to get a better place. Spice Island Sall, with bonnet wrecked and dahlias drooping, forgot the lesson, and cursed with brazen lungs. Many watches and purses changed owners in the scrimmage; the booty being whisked away in little carts, stationed to receive deposits.

And so the fight went on for fifteen rounds, one occasionally scoring, and then the other. In the sixteenth, slogging was the order of the day. Cyrus started with a severe one from the left, and got countered by the Pink, who in turn received a stunning blow under the ear, which sent him to grass. But he was not done yet, though Cribb screamed in glee, “Go on, my boy, my angel! You can’t lose now.” Of a truth, the Pink, so gay and *débonnaire* a while ago, appeared a piteous spectacle. Staggering, but game, he rose from his second’s knee and felt blindly for his foe. His grand attitude made him look a perfect gladiator, despite his punishment,

and a murmur of approbation rose from all except Lord Osmington, who glared and bit his nails. Cyrus again got his right on Caleb's eye, causing blood to flow afresh; but 'twas from the old cut. He was touched in return, and almost instantly, by a cross buttock of exquisite skill, Caleb tumbled him over.

"By the Lord!" bawled Vere, "that was sublime. If you do it again you'll win!"

"Will he?" gibed Cribb, forgetting the rank of the speaker. "That he won't. It's a matter of minutes. His bolt is shot."

How long it lasted! Time, laying down his scythe, seemed to have taken a place as spectator. How well both pugilists faced one another, exhausted both, but each breathing defiance. Cyrus showed signs of distress, but Randal encouraged him between every round with prudent words of counsel. Caleb was evidently "going to pieces," the amateurs declared; but, bolstered with strong waters, he maintained his bulldog pluck. He would not allow himself or his seconds to whisper of defeat, repeating over again as he tottered from his corner, "Who'd have thought he was no cur? But I'll do him—do him yet." For several rounds more he staggered up to be knocked down, though Cyrus would fain have let him be.

But Cribb would not hear of it. "We had enough trouble last time," he said. "Don't let's have more garbage from scoundrels in the newspapers."

"No, indeed," Cyrus exclaimed, with angry bitterness. "For honour's sake I'm here, for the last time. For honour's sake we'll settle it once and for ever."

The rubicon was passed, the battle altogether in his hands. Caleb came reeling again and again to meet his doom, and went heavily each time to earth with a slight push. He was aware now that hope was past, but would not strike his colours so long as he could rise to his feet. At length, exhausted nature gave in, and in one hour and ten minutes he was knocked out of time, and, beaming with exultation, Cribb threw up the sponge.

As Caleb was borne senseless to his tent, Lord Osmington's wrath broke into a torrent of abuse. "Dash, dash, dash ! Brute ! pig ! how dare you ?" was the burthen of his song. "Have I spared trouble and expense to make you win, you dolt, you block-head ? Haven't I made all sorts of promises dependent on success ; and what a fool you make me look ! I lose four thousand pounds, and my judgment will in the future be impugned. Of all the idiots, knaves, beasts, you are the most foul. You've no brains, of course ; but it's hard that your stupid arms and fists should fail you." Up and down the tent he raged like a wild animal, and Caleb, who had recovered consciousness, lay on his back, listening sullenly. To be beaten was bad enough, but to be insulted afterwards ! Poor Caleb, softened by unexpected

humiliation, burst into tears as he sprawled on the ground with rags applied to his temples, and sobbed like a woman.

"Snivelling now?" sneered Vere. "It's *you* who are the cur! Don't ever presume to show your ugly mug to me again. Do you hear? Four thousand pounds I've lost on you, you colossal booby, and prestige to boot! You grovelling, puling villain!"

His lordship banged out of the tent and leapt into his phaeton, and, devoting his grooms to the deuce, endeavoured to escape from the throng. But an immense concourse was surging about the victor's tent, hallooing, howling, cat-calling, swearing they would not depart till the idol showed himself. After a pause, the Sprig of Myrtle emerged, pale but calm as ever, having been brushed up by his delighted attendants so as to show as little punishment as possible.

"Another match!" shouted Lord Sefton. "By Jupiter, we'll pit him for the Championship. What say you, Cribb? You'd laugh on the other side of your mouth if he wrested that belt from you."

Mr. Cribb grinned, and took the hand of his boy. "He's worthy to wear it. And, please Heaven, he will some day. 'Tis for him, not me, to challenge. What say you, Cy?"

"I will never do that," responded Cyrus, with emotion. "Fight my best of friends, my father? Why, I should go down in the first round, and serve

me right. No, no ; let Thomas wear the belt, bless him, for many and many a year. When he feels inclined to retire, maybe—— But no, never again.” The voice of the victor faltered, his lip trembled, and he turned white.

“ Give him air ; he’s queer,” cried anxious Cribb.

“ A speech, a speech ! ” yelled the multitude, and the cry was taken up till it rose to a deafening roar.

“ No, no ! ” bawled Cribb. “ Why can’t you let him be, you gluttons ? Hasn’t he done enough ? ”

“ Yes ; a speech,” Cyrus said sadly. “ I ain’t good in that line, but I have a few words to say, if so be as you’ll hear me patiently.”

The acclamations subsided, and the crowd was all attention.

“ I only want you to know,” said Cyrus, with dry lips, “ that I fight no more prize battles. My mind is firmly set, and I only came out now because a dastard tried to stick me in the back. I announced before my lords and gentlemen that I’d retired from within the ropes for good, and nothing could have changed that resolution except calumnies aimed at my honour. I’ve proved how groundless were the charges ; so, come what may, the ring will know me no more.”

Lord Osmington lashed his horses furiously, and, forcing a way through the crowd, departed like a whirlwind, scattering right and left all who stood in

his path. The modest oration was approved by some for its manliness of tone and quiet deep sincerity ; but the prevailing feeling was one of profound disappointment. That one who had proved himself so worthy should, of his own free will, leave the laurels unplucked which caressed his hand was depressing ; and there was a mournfulness about his manner, as of one who looks for the last time upon the fair earth, that sat oddly on a man who had just achieved so signal and well-won a triumph. Spring, in amazement, stared at the noble patrons, then at Cribb ; but the latter lowered his eyes. Had the fellow a screw loose ? demanded his Grace of Beaufort. A man with such undoubted gifts, such rare powers, could have no right to throw them away. It was nonsense ! He was dizzy from the blows he had received. In a few days he would be all right again, ready to come forward. He, the Duke, would be his patron ; was prepared to do anything in the way of encouragement. Hanged if the fellow should not accompany him to Badminton, and live on the fat of the land ! It was proper and noble of him to refuse to fight his friend, but there were others who could show fine sport. That young Jack Randal, now ; just the same age and size and weight. Hanged if he should not meet Jack Randal before the fall of the leaf ! Lord Sefton shouted in chorus.

But Cyrus was calmly determined, though thankful

for the kindness of amateurs. He had a reason for leaving the ring which his old friend Cribb knew of, from whom he had no secrets. He did feel faint and queer, and would retire to rest for a little, if they'd be so good as to permit it. Thanking one and all, he bade them a long farewell and health and happiness. With a bow to the open-mouthed multitude, he vanished within his tent, and, crouching on a stool, buried his face in his hands. Poor fellow! You are aware that the Champion of England was the mildest of men, that he would not smite a fly save as a matter of business; and yet, as he stood over the victor of the fight and marked his mental suffering, the violence of the inner conflict which he had hidden from public gaze under an impassible exterior, he breathed words that were uncomplimentary to Abigel—felt as if he'd like to do her a personal injury. "Why is it so ordained?" he groaned, scratching his pate in perplexity. "Why is it that we always fall in love with the wrong people, and are so perversely blind, while outsiders can see so clearly? This dear, honest boy is pining for what in all probability he'll never have, and if he does get it, much will he be benefited thereby! He'll make himself wretched and her too. If one is to suffer, I'd rather it was she. Oh, how I'd like to strangle her, the interfering baggage!"

The multitude dispersed, perplexed, displeased. Randal and Spring stared at Cribb.

"If this is the way he takes victory, how would he take defeat?" grumbled the latter. "He looks as if his heart were broke and life a vale of tears."

"Are we to stay here till to-morrow?" grunted Randal, with impatience. "If I won a fight, blessed if I wouldn't trundle back to town alongside a dook at least. The swells have bolted; nothing left but a hired trap. Blowed if it ain't disgraceful!"

"You go and get it ready, then," said Thomas, seeing that remonstrances were torture to his favourite. "We'll trundle back quietly in the cool of the evening together, and finish the night at the Lion."

Cyrus had delivered the oration which cost him such an effort in crystal accents, which rose clear above the stillness; and Caleb Rann, lying swathed with bandages, heard and marvelled. "Not a bad sort," he mumbled aloud, while his seconds thought him wandering. "A good sort, but rummy—deuced rummy. Not a cur. Beg pardon; my lord a mean blackguard, a beast! Called *me* a cur! As if I hadn't done my best! Cursed and reviled me! The sneak, to hit a fellow when he's down!" Mr. Rann's wits grew clouded again, and he seemed to sleep; but after a few seconds sprang up with fever in his eye. "Leave me alone!" he snarled. "Know my business! Is Sprig of Myrtle gone? Want to see Sprig of Myrtle, quick!"

No. The victor was not gone; was just stepping

into the hired trap, whose seediness had evoked the spleen of Randal.

"Ask him to come to me. Cursed *me*; called *me* a cur! Won't I be even with him? Damn the reward! Tell the Sprig to come."

Caleb lay back panting and closed his eyes, but opened them again to see Cyrus looking gravely down on him.

"You want *me*?" he said. "Cheer up; you'll soon be as right as ever."

"'Tain't that," muttered the humbled Pink. "Can't see. Blind—but wish you no ill-will, old pal. Let me call you 'pal.' Really thought you were a coward, and beg pardon. This fogle, wear it; for it belongs to you, the trophy of the vanquished."

With a sickly smile Caleb detached his pink handkerchief and handed it to Cyrus.

"Cheer up," cried the latter, cheerily. "A few nice washes of black briar-root will remove the mourning from your face, and you'll be as right as a trivet. I am glad you sent for me, and that's a fact; for I always thought you a sly, vindictive fellow, who'd never forgive a beating. I ask your pardon for reading you so ill. We'll part without rancour. Good-bye; for I leave the ring for ever, and London, too."

"Both of us mistaken, then. Never bore malice to one as was my master," murmured Caleb, speaking with difficulty, "but can't abear a sneak. Why

leave the ring?" he asked suddenly, trying to peer into the other's face from under a dripping bandage. "Tain't idle curiosity, but don't answer unless you like. I saw an advertisement in the Yorkshire news-sheet with your name to it."

"You did?" cried Cyrus, on the *qui vive* at once. "What can you know about it?"

A grin passed over the battered visage of the Pink as he responded with feeble wagging, "Not so indifferent now—eh? I've been jack of many trades. You know that well enough. Boatman, bargee—was once a vintner's man at York. That ain't so very far from Stratton-on-the-Fosse."

"I remember that you were. Well?"

"Mind you, I don't claim no reward, though I shall be precious hard up after this failure. I tell you, to show I bear no malice to the man who can be my master. It's a stone that's wanted, isn't it, with a cherub in marble atop?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, then, when I was at York I was sent, with another chap, to the great house by my employer to move a lot of port from one cellar to another. 'Twas hot, they said—too near the kitchen wall. When we'd changed the bins, I saw a cherub staring at me, which was startling; and clearing the cobwebs, saw that it was an old memorial stone that had been used as a partition, and mighty comic I thought it was to use

such a thing for such a purpose. The thing's there still, I suppose," he added ; "for when the wine was removed, they shot in a batch of firewood. Any way, it's worth seeing to, if it does you any good, and I give you the information gratis."

Cy Smalley's depression was transformed into joy. What news for Abigel ! He had been looking forward ruefully to a journey northward to try and make his peace, feeling but too well that the damsel's brow would be all frowns, her eyes flashing with indignation. How could he possibly make his peace ? She would rave, and he would be abject ; but she would never, never trust him any more—could never grow to like him. A vague notion had flitted through his brain that perhaps she would be touched by the heroism with which he could dash the cup of triumph from his lips for love of her. But, then, she would possibly say, " You're full of protestations and promises and vows, but can break them easily enough when it suits your purpose. You vowed before that you had given up the ring, never to return to it. How do I know but that some day, when I have married you, a scribbler will assail your honour, as you call it, and you'll be tearing off again to break his head ? " What could he reply to that ? Henceforth it did not signify what people whispered behind his back. Nothing could have been more decisive than the victory. Caleb—queer fellow—admitted as much

complacently ; he who had been so scornful and full of spite. But Cy had broken his solemn promise ; that was a hard fact—how could he deny it ? He was far too straightforward to attempt any such thing. He had broken his promise, and was not even sorry to have done so. Unrepentant, how could he hope for forgiveness ? Abigel would cast him forth into outer darkness as a perjured, faithless rascal. This unexpected turn of affairs, though, put a new complexion on the matter. Now he could take the coach and travel northward with gladness and a clear conscience. She would upbraid, and he would laugh. She would fly into tantrums, and he would take her in his strong arms, press her to his manly breast, as he might some fluttering bird that must be taught to nestle quietly. He could say, “I return to you crowned with glory. I’ve saved my honour, and by doing right have won an unexpected prize. If I hadn’t beaten Caleb, his lips would have been sealed ; for he disliked me too much to do aught that might give me pleasure. We never should have found the tablet, for it would never have entered our minds to seek for a partition in a cellar.” In the joy of hearing his news she would forget to frown, forget to twit him with his broken word. For did he not hold the missing clue, the shattered link ? What would they not read upon the stone which Pentecost and the second lord had hidden so whimsically away ?

Caleb lay still upon his back, subdued, softened by the revulsion of feeling that was due to a good drubbing ; roused now and again to sorrow for himself, as he brooded over the iniquity of Lord Osmington. “To hit a fellow when he’s down, when he’s done his best !” he muttered again and again. He who spits against the wind wets his own face. Who but a foolish man would pour water on a drowned mouse ? My lord would repent his behaviour —that was a consolation. “Something more, old pal,” he whispered. “It was Lord Osmington as wrote that spiteful article in the *Morning Herald*. I know it, though he did not tell me !”

His face beaming with gratitude, Cy shook his quondam rival by the hand, and went his way ; and Spring and Randal made up their minds that he was mad, for sure never was so paradoxical a person. As for Caleb Rann, he was carried to the Stag, shorn now of its highbred company, and remained there until fit to be removed to town. His patron never sent a messenger to inquire how he was, or thought to despatch a few pounds for present emergencies. No ! Though all the knowing ones agreed that Rann had fought as well as Smalley, and had shown such a display of indomitable courage as made him worthy of the name of Englishman, the vindictive lord took no more heed of him than if he had been a log. Caleb sent to town to draw money from the consolation-

stakes ; and as the sum dwindled, he dotted up a score of hate against his unkind patron, satisfied in some sort with a conviction that the discovery of the tablet, which was so much wanted, would cause him to regret his cruelty.

CHAPTER III.

THE VICTOR RETURNS IN TRIUMPH.

As he sped northward, Mr. Cyrus Smalley had ample time to reflect upon what had happened. How guileless he had been to fall straight into my lord's trap ; and how my lord must have laughed in his sleeve to see how he gobbled the bait and splashed away down stream, unconscious of the hook in his gills ! And yet, who but those who were base themselves could have suspected such turpitude ? But through being too cunning, he had overreached himself. Of course, Cy ruminated, the proposal of the tenants to pay double rent had been reported, and my lord, having inquired into what was passing in the north, had perceived the desirability of separating the chief conspirators. He had calculated, no doubt, that the Sprig would be beaten ; that he would then, to clear a tarnished reputation, humbly return to a *status pupillari*, and would thus be too much occupied to make mischief in Yorkshire. Lured into the vortex of encouragement and flattery, he would be unable and

unwilling to renounce prospective honours. My lord trusted to the Corinthians to keep his fish in play. It was deftly imagined, and the result might have been as the schemer hoped—if Cy had not proved victor. There was where my lord made his mistake. He made a grievous blunder, too, in openly siding with Caleb; for if the Sprig had been under the patronage of the President of the Pugilistic Club, Beaufort, Worcester, and Sefton would not have taken him under their immediate protection. With such powerful protectors he was secure from foul play. My lord's undisguised fury had a bad effect with the élite.

"Vere's certainly going to the dogs," his Grace of Beaufort observed musingly to my lord Worcester, as they rolled back to town. "*Noblesse oblige.* If we lose our money, we should keep our temper. Hanged if I ever saw anything so spiteful and so foul-mouthed! Four thousand pounds he said he lost. A fleabite. To listen to his outcry, one would imagine that his rent-roll had been staked on the hazard of the fists. In a President of the Pugilistic Club a most unseemly exhibition!" A verdict that was fully endorsed by the refined occupants of White's window.

On reflection, Cy was ashamed of himself for having been so easily caught in the snare; and yet it settled one vexed point in his mind. Vere was desperately afraid of something resulting from the search—of

some glittering nugget being turned up by the patient delvings of Miss Rowe and her auxiliary. He was afraid of Madam Pentecost, or would long since have sent the inquisitive damsels into space. From which it was fair to conclude that he knew himself to be a usurper, and that Pentecost knew it also. But all's well that ends well. Many a criminal is undone by over-caution, brought to justice by the over-elaboration of his arrangements. If the toils had not been spread, chuckle-headed Cy would not have floundered into them ; he would probably never have met Caleb Rann any more on earth. What a fatality that my lord's tactics should have brought the two men in contact again whom it ought to have been his utmost endeavour to keep apart ; that emulation in reaching a goal should have given rise to a whimsical friendship between those persons, who ought to have remained enemies !

When Cyrus arrived at Ripon, he received an ovation. The tidings of victory had been transmitted by the Flying Coach, and all the tagrag and bobtail of the town came forth to greet the conqueror. The landlady of the Unicorn stood under her archway wreathed in smiles, with the ostler by her side, bearing a bowl of spiced stingo ; and the knowing ones of the West Riding (all the knowing ones are not in the metropolis) stood forward as a deputation, and thanked the noble youth in a set speech for upholding the

repute of their county. And if Ripon was delighted, what of retired Stratton? All the village turned out in full fig, men, women and children—even pet dogs—with Kimpton the blacksmith at their head; and the bellringers indulged in their merriest peal, to the scandal of the vicar, who didn't approve of such doings. Never was such a hero as this hero. My lord Wellington might beat Bony, and all the country far and wide would rise to give him thanks. But here was the child of Stratton-on-the-Fosse—flesh of its flesh and bone of its bone—who had come home like a triumphant David. Stratton would be but a stepmother if she showed no maternal pride. So the apothecary stood out, cleared his throat, as spokesman, with his bald crown glistening in the sun, and spake *ore rotundo*, to the terrified admiration of all listeners; and the proprietor of the general shop, where pegtops and sweet-stuff and hobnailed boots vied for public favour, determined not to be behind, made a complimentary oration of a flamboyant character, in words of at least five syllables.

It was a great day for Stratton, for the apothecary, and the proprietor of boots and brandy-balls, and the grocer, and other magnates decided that nothing but a British blow-out could do justice to so splendid an occasion. A subscription was hurriedly raised; tables were laid out under the big trees opposite the inn, and the health of the Sprig of Myrtle was drunk with

uproarious applause. Tom Kimpton, in a waistcoat like a leopard-skin, that had never seen the day since his wedding, rubbed his old face with horny fingers, and explained how he had known it would be so. He had always been sure that there was summat in the lad, who'd make 'em all proud of him some day, and sure enough he was right; and simple, blushing Cyrus was astonished, as he listened, to think that from infancy he had been a marvel, whom all the world, except himself, knew to be predestined to glory. All this was vastly gratifying to the young man's vanity, but at the bottom of the cup were bitter lees. The tenor of his own discourse in front of the tent at Kingston had not been transmitted to Yorkshire.

These kind friends were not aware that the book of ambition was closed for him, that he was never more to do his county credit. The local doctor, who was nettled by the success of the apothecary and rendered foolhardy by beer, launched into poetic flights, and depicted rosy visions, wherein the Sprig of Myrtle, stripped to the waist, stood awaiting victims. As the daughters of the Greeks were eaten by the Minataur, so would the Sprig snap up and crunch all candidates for fistic fame. The plain in front of his dwelling would be covered with the corses of the slain. Corses did he say? Bones—*humeri, tibiæ, fibulæ, scapulæ*—picked clean and white by the

all-powerful and omnivorous maw. This was so grand an excursion up Parnassus, that the apothecary hung his diminished head and the company were moved to tears. But, indeed, they were by this time very drunk, and wore their feelings upon their sleeves. Cyrus was overwhelmed with embraces; his smart new coat was pawed by many a dusky hand, dabbed with beery finger-marks; and damp whispers were hiccupped in his ear to the effect that every one had known it all along, and had always prophesied as much. Amidst the volubility that grew out of home-brewed ale, Cyrus found it impossible to explain his views. They would keep. What was the use of dashing the pleasure of to-day with prognostications of a gloomy morrow? It was highly satisfactory to be appreciated by his own village folk. As he looked at the bunches of myrtle that freely decked the board in honour of his cognomen, he wondered what *she* would think, whose favourite plant it was. Would she be glad he had won a victory, or would she turn up that blessed little nose? It would not do to be any longer in suspense; so bidding farewell to his generous entertainers, with hand-shakes and mutual good wishes, he turned into the park with jocund mind to seek his pretty cousin.

Abigel did not fume, or dart sweet lightnings, or stamp her bewitching little foot. She looked up at Cyrus as he appeared on the ruined terrace, and

contemplated him with a far-off gaze, as we survey, our minds attuned to a minor key, a portrait of one who is gone. She was very quiet, thin and pale and somewhat listless, she who could be so extravagantly active; and the yearning heart of Cy kindled and flamed. To think that she was like an Indian widow on her husband's pyre, sacrificing herself on the altar of an idea—offering up her youth before a deity who could look stolidly on the while! The yearning heart endured another pang. Why was it that the loved face had lost its look of brightness? Was it that she was disappointed in her quest? Or was it that she had regretted the absence of her cousin? Alas! how could he bring himself to think so? Was it that she pined for the visible presence of the fascinating jackanapes? With what exultation did Cyrus thank Heaven for that disclosure of Caleb's—a piece of information which would go towards separating those two for ever.

Like most jealous men, our pugilist was wrong in his reckoning. Abigel was pale and listless because everything that she could possibly bring herself to desire had been sliding away, leaving her to sink into quicksands. The chubby-cheeked phenomenon was alive still. The quest did not progress. The one picture of the future which seemed possible, as a means some day of filling an empty life, eluded her grasp.

She forced herself to rise, however, from her seat

on the terrace-steps as Cyrus approached, with a pretty look of sympathy; for Kimpton the blacksmith had rushed to the manor-house with news of the fight, and so, knowing all about it, she craved particulars with the courteous politeness of one who takes pains to show civility.

The letter she had written, bidding Leoline not to despair, had been answered, and had provoked her much. Was she not a miserable girl to be uncertain as to what she wanted, to be so dissatisfied with the unrolling of events, the development of the characters and fortunes of those for whom she professed to care? What is the use of sacrificing your best years for the behoof of one who afflicts you with metrical praise? Leo was guilty of this misdemeanour; for when she scribbled in hot earnest that she had come upon yet another priceless document, he replied with a sonnet on spurs and steel leg-pieces, regretting that so doughty a warrior should combat in so weak a cause. Three days after, he despatched a really beautiful poem about a sea-nymph, who gave up immortality to impart a moment of joy to a poor fisher-lad—a poem which she read with ardent glow, then quickly put away. There was something distasteful about the end of it; for 'twas unpleasant to hearken to soft nothings from *his* lips. Of course they were soft nothings. Poets are privileged to go into rhapsody about Chloe and Glycera and their countless charms; and while we

read, we know all the time that the poet cares nothing about one or t'other—that he is winking his eye, with his tongue in his cheek. Stella is but a peg to hang flowing couplets on. Well, but why, you will say, be annoyed by that which is the acknowledged practice of poets? We are not annoyed by the doggerel nonsense on a bonbon. We laugh and cry, “What tomfoolery!” Perhaps the soft nothings coming from the poet Griggs would not have displeased Abigel. Perhaps she was inwardly racked by the tender platitudes, because she would so like to have heard them in real earnest from *his* lips! Be that as it may, she locked the verses in a drawer, sighing over the weariness of her existence, wondering why her particular dark cloud had never been provided with a lining—hugging her lonely heart, cynically brooding over its emptiness. Was it through fault of hers that her heart was condemned to be empty? Can it be a beneficent spirit that rules so rugged a world?

There was no vestige of anger in the demeanour of Miss Rowe when she advanced to receive her cousin. During the months which passed after his abrupt departure for town, she had had leisure for self-examination of the most stringent kind; and reflection showed how much to blame she had been in accepting at his hands that which he had not to give. How could she excuse herself for offering up Cy for the good of Leoline? She had been selfish and naughty; he had

overrated his strength. How many of us in moments of exaltation and hysterical fervour vow to do things of which we are incapable when we have wakened from a condition of ecstasy? How many of the Crusaders wished their tongues had been bitten out before they had registered stupid promises to go to Palestine? What was to be gained by the futile journey? Nothing, except wounds, and hardships, and expense, and a prospect of burial like a pauper's—a prospect, for such warriors as succeeded in escaping death, of finding madam married to her page, or misbehaving with a troubadour. What silly promises we make, and how speedily we regret our folly! Jephthah was not the only precipitate person, I dare say. Human nature being unstable, vows should be accepted in the light of flowery compliments; but as for expecting them to be carried out—no! We wiseacres should know better. Left to herself, Abigel perceived that she had been downright wicked. No woman whatsoever has a right to call upon a man to abandon the set direction of his life, his cherished aspirations, to satisfy a caprice of hers. If Cy was to give up all, what was he to receive in return? There was so little that she had to give. He was an excellent, staunch fellow, who, having promised more than he could perform, had fallen away. Was he to be blamed for it? No. The deplorable mania for fisticuffs was apparently not to be eradicated. He must be considered with

his drawbacks, and appreciated accordingly. Was it not whimsical that, despite the drawbacks, he should persist in panting after his cousin ? But for them that shadowy idyl might have been realized, in which a cot and a dairy and buttercups and cowslips bore their part—not such a contemptible consummation, after all ! Alack ! That had gone the way of all the other fairy visions ; and Abigel, seeing it fade, and being a woman, began to regret it as something quite to be desired. Why should a maid, who had deliberately chosen the lowly life, turn up her nose at such a spouse as Cy—tall, with a splendid figure and an honourable nature ? Ah, but those butcher-like proclivities ! Though he might swear they were smothered, they were sure to sprout some time. What a prospect—to abide with a husband who was always casting regretful glances at his biceps ; whose manner was always whispering, “ Cowslip wine, my love, and newlaid eggs are very nice, but the sward and the ropes are nicer ” ! Cy had been good and loyal, and was a dear, kind boy ; but he could not help his proclivities. If it was necessary to his earthly well-being that he should batter noses, he must e'en have his eccentric way ; but really—really it was too much to expect a cousin, who was an adept in the cymbal and shawl-dance, to stand by with the sponge ! An unconquerable desire to batter the nose of Rann had forced Cyrus to town. Well, the nose of

Rann had been battered ; Cy was satisfied ; and since he had paid her the compliment of sporting her favourite blossom, it was only fair that she should inquire how he enjoyed his victory.

But this indifferent politeness was exquisitely harrowing to the Sprig of Myrtle. Tears, upbraidings, face-scratchings, would have been infinitely preferable ; for indifference is a deft mason in the matter of wall-building. Those communings in the woods over the intricate affair of the peerage had been delicious, though the subject was not specially interesting to him ; for she had followed his views with breathless interest, and had shown the most ravishing of lip-twisting when he made a shrewd suggestion, had even squeezed his big fingers and sent a thrill into his marrow. But now ! 'Twas like a lady taking up a servant's character—so frigid and ceremonious. Why did she not blurt out her blunt dislike of Rann and Randal and the Champion, and all the Pugilistic Club, and their sanguinary performances, instead of talking prunes and prism, and inquiring, with affected civility, if Mr. Cribb was well ?

Cy was not prepared for this, and could not bear it. “Don’t go on so, Abby,” he pleaded ; “it makes me mad. It’s nought to you who won, or how many rounds there were. Let’s talk of something else.”

“Fie, my dear !” the dutiful maid responded. “I

am keenly alive to my cousin's success, a cousin whom I really and truly like very much indeed. The villagers behaved most properly, and I'm charmed with that grumpy, delightful old Kimpton. If they'd asked me to the feast, I'd have been there to drink your worship's health."

Was the naughty jade joking, or in earnest? Did she speak thus, knowing that her words were sharpened rowels in the flanks of her plunging victim? She seemed quite in earnest; was apparently really glad that her cousin should be pleased. Oh, what a wall of Cyclopean masonry! He had worked hard to separate his sweetheart from the poet Leo. The breach was wider still 'twixt her and himself. That cunning, diabolical lord had succeeded in dividing the cousins; but he should be baffled all the same. As he ground his teeth, Cyrus Smalley swore it, and again thanked Caleb in spirit for his invaluable gift.

"What have you been doing since I left?" he inquired, to change the subject. "Gossiping with Betty Higgs and Sally Scraggs? My bird, how bored you must have been!"

"I am not bored," replied the listless girl. "I am resigned."

"Then you have found out nothing new?"

Abigel pondered. Why should she tell him? The compact was broken by him, and it was better so. What had he to do with the quest?

"What would you have me find?" she asked, with assumed carelessness.

"The stone—the monumental tablet."

"I don't want the stone."

"Why, have you tired of your hobby?" exclaimed Cy, half pleased, half disappointed.

"No; but I've resolved to trouble you no more with it."

That was a slap in the face.

"But if I choose to be troubled—for your sake? Why don't you want the stone?"

"Because I have got the name without it. The man with white hair was called Miles Jarvis."

Abby expected to see the face of Mr. Smalley beam with respectful admiration, and was no little disconcerted when he calmly shook his head.

"No, it wasn't," he asserted with dogged conviction. "I'd remember if I saw or heard the name. I know it wasn't Miles."

"But, you pigheaded athlete, I have it in his own handwriting—in the writing, that is, of James, the father. He talks of his two children, Miles and Dorcas."

"Can't help that. The eldest wasn't Miles, I'll swear."

What was the girl to think? Could he be right; and was Miles a second son or a third? The brow of Miss Rowe became corrugated with perplexity; and

Cyrus, radiant, proceeded without more ado to communicate his news.

Her chin resting on both palms, Abigel listened with round eyes, and long after the pugilist had ceased to speak she continued to sit crouching motionless. How vain is human planning, scheming, foresight! Had this blundering fellow done as he was bid, they might have groped on for ever without result. By an act of mutiny, which she had schooled herself to treat with forbearance, the clue had come into her hand. In the midst of her joy she felt humbled, for 'twas by a happy accident, not through deft generalship on her part.

"Can you pardon my going away?" pleaded Cyrus, timidly. "I could not help it, you know—indeed, I could not; and, as you perceive, it has turned out for the best. Do, please, be a little angry—just a little, to show that you are yourself."

"Thank you, sir, for the compliment," Abigel replied, with the still air of endurance that sat so oddly on her. "How can I be angry, when the finger of Heaven seems to direct our way? I was lonely, my dear, and sorrowful; but that's past. Angry! I'm very, very glad, but too surprised to think coherently."

Darkness was encompassing Miss Rowe. Things shaped themselves so differently from the way in which she planned them, that, distrustful of her own capacity for judgment, she felt tempted to give up attempting

to direct the course of events. Here had she been moping and deplored the lukewarmness and possible treachery of an unstable conspirator, vowing that a veneer of politeness was all that was possible henceforth between herself and him. Then, presto ! back comes the delinquent, quite cockahoop and confident, bearer of information about a stone which she had abandoned hopes of finding, to claim in exchange the renewal of a tacit promise which she knew now ought never to have been given. Her impulse was peremptorily to refuse. But his pleading was so earnest ! Had she a right to refuse ? What ought she to do ? His will was stronger than hers, and she felt sliding hopelessly into submission. Was it decreed that he was to have his way, and were the angels laughing at her poor attempt to combat the inevitable ? The dairy and buttercup idyl was, perhaps, to be realized after all, and a feeling of restfulness crept over her at the thought. Was it possible that he would grow content to plough his fields, without thinking of his biceps or his mawleys ? No, no ! She had learned in solitude that such a sacrifice must never be accepted. Why grope in the dark ? Better far to fold the hands and be drawn along without buffeting by unseen agency. Even if allowed to arrange her life according to fancy, did she know how she would arrange it ? Certainly not. Then, since so one-sided a contest was contrary to nature's law, a struggle against Fate was midsummer

madness. It seemed tolerably certain that active happiness was never to be hers. She was a solitary little being on a great seething earth, to whom, individually, nothing mattered. If one speck in the vast crowd chose to declare that his happiness depended upon her, surely 'twould be best to win a small amount of satisfaction by giving way to the desires of that speck. Her education rose in protest. And yet—what had her education been to Abigel, but a curse? Why not forget it, stifle it, erase from the tablets of memory the brief glimpse of better things? How far away was Almack's now—the condescension of the great London ladies! Sure 'twas a dream coined in a distempered brain. Why not, abjuring prejudices that befitted not one so lonely and so friendless, try to make this obstinately faithful fellow happy, since he would have it so? Why pretend to be better than he? Why not, without ridiculous jibbings, consent at once to be the bruiser's bride, and conscientiously strain every nerve to get used to the battering of noses?

Thus did Abigel cynically reason; and Mr. Smalley, taking silence for consent, pressed her close to his breast and kissed her delicious little ear. She submitted to his will without a word, for it evidently was to be as he desired. She was to be Mrs. Sprig of Myrtle, and prepare hot porter and raw steaks all through her life, as she had chosen once to do in a

moment of coquettish caprice ; and when her lord and master grew too old for victory, she was to tuck him up in bed and apply plasters to his bruises. That was to be her future. Not a sunny one ; but if it must be, 'twas well to look it boldly in the face.

" Cy, my dear," she murmured. " Don't, sir ! But listen to what I have to say. I'm a useless, wayward girl, and it would have been better, perhaps, for myself and you too, apparently, if I had never been born. But I could not help that, you know ; so I must make the best of it. What you can see in a poor creature like your cousin I can't think, but if you must have me, your worship's will shall be my law, and I'll be a true and faithful wife to you. We will go through with this search, for there's no sort of doubt any longer but what Leoline is deprived of his rights. The day he enters here as master, I surrender at discretion, and will go back with you to London. Am I not an improved Abigel ? "

She looked up with a sad smile, which smote her lover to the heart.

" To London ? " he stammered.

" Yes," she replied calmly. " They say you've a great career. You've said so yourself often ; and Kimpton told me so. Who am I that I should spoil it ? Don't you remember asking me once in London, with reproach, if I would stand between you and fortune ? I was conceited and silly then—puffed up

with pride. You may write and tell your Mr. Cribb that he need not detest poor me, for you shall never leave the ring for my sake."

Could he believe his ears? Was this the haughty maid who had been so scornful with regard to the Champion, so distractingly domineering? Was she, not he, to make the sacrifice, since sacrifice there needs must be? Never!

"You are a darling," whispered her lover, with more caresses; "but all that is over. Please don't look so humble. Humility sits on you like an ill-fitting garment. I've bidden a formal farewell to the past. Let's say no more about it, and make the best of this precious discovery."

I protest that it is vastly affecting to see two estimable young persons vying one with t'other in nobility of soul; and the process was exceedingly comforting to themselves, as well as to you and me, for the pair looked calmly content, as, hand in hand, they penetrated into the den of grandam Pentecost, to investigate the condition of that lady. She took no heed of either of them as they entered, but squatted in her old position with skinny fingers spread over the flames, rocking to and fro with lips close set. Her grandson dutifully wished her a good day, and she slowly turned dim eyes towards him, and then back to the fire. Her wizened aspect caused grave concern to Cyrus, who saw changes in her which Abigel, who

gazed constantly on the unlovely spectacle, was unable to perceive. Hand in hand they stole out on tiptoe, and Mr. Smalley said, "She's breaking fast. That's terrible!"

Since the old woman was dumb, and it was impossible to get anything out of her, Abigel was fain to confess that she did not see that the demise of the decrepit housekeeper signified very much. "I shouldn't like to grow so old and imbecile," she remarked, shuddering. "How would you enjoy the sight of your old wife mumbling all day over the brandy bottle?" But she also looked grave when Cy explained his ideas, and marvelled at his perspicacity.

"If the old woman dies," he said, "the place will be closed to you and me. If there is any more to be discovered here, it must be seen to at once."

He was right. It behoved them, therefore, to make the most of their time; so, lighting a taper, they descended, without delay, to explore the mysteries of the cellar.

As to the required name not being Miles, the deliberate certainty of Cy carried conviction with it. At any rate, it was most necessary to find and examine the stone, to see if the names tallied; for 'twould never do, after all the trouble, to go off at a tangent on a wildgoose chase after Miles, if he was only a second son. Out on second sons—useless cattle!

Unsatisfactory and troublesome enough in life, they surely are, without giving extra trouble after death !

A hazardous job, like searching in the Catacombs. Rats, undisturbed for ever so long, sat up on hind-legs, then scuttled off to tell their friends of the intrusion. Bats squeaked in protest, as, hanging upside down by their feet, they blinked at the explorers. One step had fallen out of its place, leaving a gap. The door at the bottom required a sturdy push from Mr. Smalley's shoulder, and creaked and wheezed ere it fell back with a bang that echoed through the mansion. Half suffocated with dust, the cousins glanced guiltily at each other. A noise like a clap of thunder—would it wake grandam from her musings and bring her creeping after them ? Quick, then, to find what was required, before she came howling in their rear. They paused to listen. No ; all was right. Her dim hearing had not caught the sound. As they advanced with difficulty, Cy began to have misgivings, and upbraided himself in that he had not explored alone before divulging his news to Abigel. What a disappointment if the stone were gone ! My lord might have had it removed, since the far-off days—ten years ago it must have been, at least—when Caleb was a vintner's assistant. And yet not so. He could never have known what became of it ; his father could never have known what was done with it. Through the carelessness of domestics only could it have been

allowed still to exist. The order must have been a careless one—to some understrappers during the alterations in the church—to take the slab out of the vestry where it lay, and put it away in the manor-house for safety. That was probably the order issued. To bid his men deliberately to destroy it would have given rise to tittle-tattle in the servant's hall and after-gossip in the alehouse. Certainly Vere could not be aware that it was in existence, or he would not have pounced like a vulture on the papers as the last remaining proofs. Therefore, Cy cast aside misgivings, and led the way along the passage, holding the taper aloft. What a rambling basement—a honeycomb of cellars, some fast locked, through the iron gratings in whose doors the cobwebbed shapes of bottles were indistinctly visible, like caddis-worms entombed in rows! That one to the right was cleaner than the rest—'twas evidently from thence that the liquor was taken for the use of my lord on his rare visits to the north. To the left a winding way, with an arch at the end, from which the door had dropped.

"Come, Abby, to the left, and let us see what we shall see. Forward! This must be the place."

A grating larger than the others admitted a glint of day. It yielded to the touch. Through this aperture, no doubt, the wood had been shot in, and through it had also come—might they hope so?—the monumental slab on which they based so much.

The old bins, there they were, roughly partitioned with anything that had come handy. A flat surface veiled with many webs—could that be it? Abigel clung wildly to Cy's coat, and her knees knocked together as he gathered some wisps of straw and commenced dusting. Freestone—freestone it was! At the far end near the outer wall something bulged, black and round, like a huge spider that might have spun all these elfin curtains. "Oh, Cy, dear, rub it quick! What is it? Can it be——" The skin of the mimic spider shrivelled off. Beneath was something white. Presently it stood revealed—a cherub's head smirking with bliss eterne. Oh, thrice blessed cherubic countenance! Oh, blessed Betty Higgs to have remembered the cherub's head! There it was, true enough. The simpering grin was a beatific smile, omen of success. "Quick, dearest, dearest Cy! Rub the precious slab, that we may read its invaluable legend." Cy rubbed with a will. He was overjoyed. Everything was going well with him. *Fais ce que dois advienne que pourra!* He had done right according to his light, and was reaping his reward, in that the winsome nut-brown arms were twined about him in the dimness, and that he could feel the hurried throbbing of the tender little breast.

The slab was loose, and yielded to the strong muscles of Mr. Smalley. He succeeded in turning it round and leaning it against the wall, smirking

cherub upmost ; and then the words writ the last Lord Northallerton were legible. The voice from the grave spoke.

“ Sacred to the Memory of James Christopher Jervois, of Broagh in Ireland (second son of Leoline, Earl of Northallerton), and of Sarah Rafferty his wife. He departed this life an exile from his native land Anno Domini 1752, leaving one son Roger Jarvis or Jervois to regret his loss—but not for long. An infant he was called away, down into the garden to gather lilies. In life they might not be with us. In memory they may. Such is the will and desire of Archibald, Earl of Northallerton, by whom this tablet is erected in the parish church of Stratton-on-the-Fosse. April 20, 1755.”

Leaning on Cy’s arm, Abigel resigned herself to thought. This was very strange. James Christopher Jervois, of Broagh in Ireland. What about his proposed migration to England, then ? Did it never take place ? Perhaps Archibald answered that last letter, begging him to stay where he was, lest in England he should be pursued and tried. Roger, then, was the name of the son—the *only* son. Who was Miles, then ? The last piece of evidence, discovered in the lapis-lazuli receptacle, did not tally with the record on the tablet. Was the earl mistaken, or did he wilfully put up a lie ? He might take it for granted on insufficient proof that the son had “ gone

down into the garden to gather lilies ; " but it was curious he should have been ignorant of the existence of other children. Even supposing that he could consider an elder to be an only son, could he be mistaken in a name ? What a labyrinth it was ! The last document distinctly spoke of two children, Miles and Dorcas. Well, the last lord was too magnificent to remember all the children of a Sarah Rafferty ; was inclined, perchance, to help sister Selina to inherit rather than lowborn brats. Fancy the blood of a Rafferty being mingled with that of the Plantagenets ! Perhaps Roger really died of small-pox, and Archibald purposely ignored Miles for the sake of Selina ? Was ever anything more intricate ? If Abigel had never penetrated within the receptacle of lapis lazuli, she would not have been puzzled. That Roger was the name of the son she sought there could be no doubt, for Cyrus gave a cry when he beheld it. He recognized it as the name on the burnt letter, that had so long escaped his recollection. Roger being the elder son, then, 'twas on his trail that the bloodhounds must be set. That Roger had not died, as Archibald might have been mistaken in supposing, was proved by the eagerness of Vere in destroying that letter. If Roger had indeed gone down into the divine garden, while a possibly existent Miles survived, it would have been his interest to save the letter from destruction, that searchers might be

set on a wrong track. Roger, then, it was clear, had remained on earth to gather a lion's share of brambles instead of lilies ; so for the present, at least, the other children, if any, were of no consequence. It was very likely that Archibald, for sister Selina's sake, had managed to ignore Miles and Dorcas. To that end, no doubt, to baulk further inquiry, he had declared that James Christopher died an exile. The lapis-lazuli letter, as we may call it for distinction, was precise as to a migration into England. Roger, at least, must have made the journey ; for he had appeared to Pentecost, and on being repulsed, had threatened *soon to return again*. Hence his dwelling-place could not have been very far remote from Battle Magna. If that abode could be discovered, what a step in advance might be gained !

"Poor Roger ! Mysterious wanderer !" sighed Abigel. "Tell us where you lived, that we may search your dwelling for papers ! "

Though the conspirators were sure now as to Roger, they were no nearer to a certainty that Hans, soldier, was his son. Miss Rowe being meek, and inclined to be dutiful to him who, whether she liked it or not, was to be her lord, looked up at that gentleman and said, "What shall we do now ?" Cy, however, was absorbed by a contemplation of his own stupidity in not having been able to recollect the name. He looked so foolish, and his face was so liberally be-

smeared with grime when they emerged into the upper air, that his betrothed tapped him on the arm with a tinge of her old asperity.

"Don't be so stupid!" she cried. "Think!"

After ruminating with painful deliberation, and rubbing the cellar-grime well into the pores of his skin, Cy was delivered of another idea. In sooth he was a miracle of brightness. "Let us call on Tom Kimpton to-morrow," he suggested, "and tell him that the monument is found."

The advice was sage. The blacksmith was anxious for Leoline's success. Much had been already learnt from him, and he or his gossips might suggest a means of advancing a step farther. It was hard to wait till to-morrow; but Abigel had much to think over, and tossed about all night, groping in a maze of perplexity, wondering if they would ever get to the bottom of the mystery, and if in sober truth she was to be a bruiser's bride, and gird him with the belt some day.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONSPIRATORS TRY ARTIFICE.

MR. KIMPTON gladly threw down his hammer when he beheld the cousins, and tucked up his leather apron in token that on occasion he could be open to a chat even in business hours. His rugged face was puckered into jovial wrinkles, for, as he sapiently observed, he could see into a brick wall as far as most people, and thought it a fitting climax that the victor should be crowned with bays by the hands of the fair. “Those two ’ll make a match of it before winter, and I’ll give away the bride,” he declared oracularly to the apothecary’s assistant, when Cy escaped from his entertainers under the trees and went off in search of Abigel. “We’ve done him honour, and he’s grateful for the compliment, as a good and deserving young man should, for sure Stratton never jumped so at a citizen ; but he’d rather have one word of praise from her cherry lips than all the beautiful speeches spoke to-day, including that topper of the doctor’s, which was a one-er, and no mistake.” And the

gossips wagged their heads over their pipes in mute agreement as to the singular fact that young folks will be young folks and go a-courtin instead of sitting at the feet of sages. Birds and beasts will pair in springtime, taking no warning from the domestic lives of their elders, who bill and coo no more, but snarl and snap instead.

A gentleman who could see so far through a brick wall was the very person to advise a couple of schemers in a quandary. Neither Cy nor Abigel were a bit further advanced in the morning as to that knotty point of what was to be done next. It was necessary that Hans the soldier and Roger the outcast should be linked together as father and son. Could Mr. Kimpton make any suggestion as to how that might be managed? Mr. Kimpton put on his considering cap, and walked up and down the front of the forge whistling. "That Roger must have been a queer weak fellow," he mused, "to give up his game and tuck his tail between his legs because a virago stormed." He certainly never returned. The seal that Leoline wore must have been given or bequeathed by him—always supposing that he was the father of Hans the soldier—and it was highly probable that he had possessed other trinkets, documents, what not—strands from the wreck of the fugitive, which would have helped to prove his birth. But then it was quite plain that neither

energy nor money had been his, without which sinews no war may be carried on. He must have been in dire distress indeed to have so far got the better of his weakness as to pay that visit to Battle Magna. If he and the conscience-stricken Lady Olivia could have met, how different it would have been ! But, then, if things were ordained otherwise, how different everything would be, and if different, how much better ! If our old uncle had walked down such a street on such a day, at such a moment, the chimney-pot which fell harmless in the gutter would have knocked him on the head, and we should have inherited all his property ; instead of which delightful consummation, he sat at home and nursed his gout, and, taking a fancy to his housekeeper, left his wealth to her.

Mr. Kimpton was as perplexed as Miss Rowe with regard to the discrepancies between the tablet and the lapis-lazuli letter. If the latter was writ by the fugitive (as no doubt it was, since it had been so carefully put away), the facts it stated must be true, and she had better keep it as carefully as the other papers, lest it should be wanted. But he begged leave to point out that it did not deny the survival of Roger ; it merely talked of some second son, who might have led Miss Rowe into useless labyrinths but for the finding of the tablet. They need trouble themselves, then, no more for the present with regard to the lapis-lazuli letter. How to find out Roger's

retreat ? That was the point, wasn't it ? One advertisement had done wonders ; why not try another ? Why not crave information as to the whereabouts when living of one Roger Jarvis, a person of abnormal bulk and low estate ? The same difficulties would probably arise which had proved insuperable in the Irish researches. Such mean worms as he and his are not remembered. They do their humble service unnoticed, and frequently unthanked, and, when they can work no more, drift into the omnivorous workhouse. Suppose it had been necessary to advertise for information about Naomi, Leoline's luckless mamma ? Much chance there would ever have been of hearing of her death in the barn. After considering the matter from all its points of view, Kimpton declared himself in favour of an attack on Madam Smalley. He, Kimpton, as he had already told the cousins, while engaged in mending a certain door hinge, had heard her relate sundry circumstances to the present lord. She knew the facts of the case, and she alone. She must be made to speak. Cy's face fell. Could the gentleman who saw so far through a brick wall suggest nothing better than that ? It was years since he had looked on Madam Smalley, and knew not her deplorable state. In the past, so resolute a female would have been difficult to coerce ; now she was three parts imbecile, and very likely could not remember if she

would, and certainly would never speak. Kimpton was not so sure of that. When he went up to carry the news of the fight to Miss Rowe he had looked in on Madam Smalley, and was perfectly aware of her state. People said she was a witch, and had the evil eye ; hence none communed with her who could avoid doing so. But he, Kimpton, was not afraid of witches, and was of opinion that the imbecility of the old lady was rather in their favour than otherwise. His advice was, that her lips should be unsealed by stratagem. Of course it was no use to doff the hat with a bow and say, “ Good grandam, you have guarded a secret for years with the vigilance of Cerberus ; please abandon it to us now.” In the first place, she would not comprehend the request, for she had not been quite sober for half a century. She would blink and grunt and say nothing. No. An ingenious trap must be laid for her ; a surprise be prepared which would draw an exclamation. A sentence, even a word, might give the desired clue. If the worthy blacksmith had ever heard of a *coup d'état*, he would have employed the expression to denote what it was that he suggested. The lady’s grandson growled with scorn. What was Kimpton driving at ? Sure ’twas he who had been drinking. Draw an exclamation, quotha ! As soon draw a double tooth. With the patronizing and self-satisfied air of one who knows himself too clever to be readily

understood by the less enlightened, Mr. Kimpton continued to walk up and down, whistling, as he polished and matured his idea. It was a wild one—some would stigmatize it as preposterous—but in emergencies no means may be despised. Was not a great painter saved from walking backwards over the edge of a lofty scaffolding once, by the presence of mind of a friend who deliberately spoiled his picture? Had he been warned to take care, he would have turned round and toppled over; but when his friend dabbed a brush in the liquid eye of his *chef-d'œuvre*, he made an instinctive movement forward and was saved. It was a desperate remedy, but an effective one, the man's life being of more value than the picture. So was the plan projected by the blacksmith of Stratton-on-the-Fosse a desperate remedy, and the cousins, as they hearkened, admitted that if peculiar it was ingenious.

"We will act on her fears," explained Kimpton. "Remorse has made of her the wreck she is, has driven her to the Lethe of the bottle. A stubborn will saves her from babbling, but, depend upon it, the vision she is always gazing at in the hot embers is the figure of that white-haired man. Remember what I heard her relate to my lord that day: 'He promised to come back, ere he cursed me for my cruelty.' Well, why should we not bring him back now and see what comes of it? We cannot reproduce

him, not knowing what he was like; but we can produce something that will be quite as terrible to her stricken conscience, coming upon it unexpectedly after a lapse of half a lifetime. According to her own statement, the interview with Roger took place at the library window, which gives upon the terrace. We will lure her to the spot under some plausible pretence, and *let her come upon the rescued monument.*"

Such was Mr. Kimpton's scheme, and Abigel agreed that it was good.

In order that the trick should be successful, various details had to be considered. In the first place, the luckless woman's drink must be cut off, in order that she might be unprotected against external shocks. Sobriety is a terrible infliction when you are not used to it. The breaking of a bottle or two would settle that. Abigel would write something on a piece of paper and leave it within her reach—this to turn her thoughts to the interview in the library. Cyrus and their ally would make shift to move the slab from the vault where it had slept so long, and place it in the window just where the moon would touch the recorded words; and it would be strange if—startled, taken unawares—she did not say something which should put the watchers on the scent.

It was extremely wrong of the cousins to behave thus to a blood relation, to form plans and place snares for her betrayal; but young people will be

selfish, and, moreover, it must be remembered that Madam Smalley had been to both of them a ghoul, more given to curses than blessings—an uncanny sorceress, who, as they grew up, obtained no part of their affection, being only an unpleasant specimen of an ancient dame with something on her mind. It was essential now to delve into her harassed bosom, and they salved their consciences for twisting the screw into her flesh by reflecting that it would not do her much real harm, and that they would make up for it in brandy afterwards.

Unlucky Madam Smalley ! Hadst thou shown more kindness to thy flesh and blood, they would not have turned against thee, or have twanged upon thy feelings as on a harp ! The rustic attendant was dismissed for a day's holiday, Miss Rowe declaring that rustics require rest and change as much as other folk ; and the small maiden, nothing loth to leave her lugubrious charge, accepted the treat. Pentecost cowered over the flames in her accustomed chair, a diabolical, undignified old ruin. Abigel came and went, placed a table by her side as usual, with a bottle and a mug. The bottle was three-parts empty. Abigel was but a careless nurse for one so helpless ; for she wandered away out of hearing between the tall yew hedges, sat crooning on the grass gazing down into the Fosse, idly plucking the wild currant berries and seeing them drift and drift, whirling in the eddies, floating on the

pools; while the feeble voice of her grandaunt quavered for the absent rustic. It was a long day, and the girl was not without feelings of compunction as to the propriety of the proceeding which the conspirators had undertaken to carry out; but then she reflected that peccant grandaunt must be offered up on the altar of injured Leo as her own heart had been—that if she was made to suffer the pangs of sobriety and awakened conscience it was her wicked old fault, and the only reparation which could be made for lifelong sin. As her own heart had been! Oh dear, as if she had ever had such an article! How should such a shuttlecock boast of a heart—a toy bandied about ever since her mother died, so long ago, between the tender mercies of grandaunt and of Lord Osmington? It was the fault of neither that she had not come to shipwreck away in London, cast defenceless on those murky waters. If she had, what would they have cared—what would any one have cared? Defenceless? Not quite. Her own sturdy spirit and native shrewdness had kept her straight, and would to the end—no thanks to those who had professed to protect and cherish her; and then, as glittering London and its high and mighty big-wigs passed like a show, she cast other berries in the stream and watched their fate, as if their meanderings would be prophetic of her own. Three ripe red berries. They started together. That one was Cy, and this one Leo, and the one in the

centre Abigel. Softly they glided on, side by side, just as the trio had done ; then Leo parted from the rest and drifted behind a stone, while the other two, caught by the current, went head over heels down a miniature waterfall and disappeared. So was she to disappear—had already done so—for none remembered her save Charlotte, who was herself forlorn. What folly ! This was idle and childish. She would get a book and read. No ; education was a delusion and a snare to one situated as she was. She must learn to give up reading—take refuge from meditation in scrubbing and household cares—for was not the die cast ? In darning the stockings of cousin Cy must her future life be spent ; in mending the doeskin breeches with yellow knee-knots ; in washing out the crimson stains due to his calling—pending the arrangement of leeches in festoons upon his bruises.

Never was a day so long ; never did the sun-chariot drag so wearily ! Would the night never come ? When Abigel looked in, grandaunt was querulous, deprived of necessary stimulant ; shivered and shook with palsy ; rocked herself and moaned. The bottle was empty, and there was no more forthcoming. Did she expect her niece to trudge off to the village like a servant to fetch brandy ? Here was a dish of tea, nice and warm. Out on the dish of tea, odourless and tasteless ! Madam Smalley pushed it from her with a qualmish movement of abhorrence, and sank yet lower in her

chair, like a heap of soiled garments, rocking and moaning. The laggard chariot got down the hill at last; twilight deepened over the landscape. Abigel lit a candle, made up the fire, and departed to her own chamber to abide the result of Mr. Kimpton's cleverness. Pentecost, worn out, was apparently asleep; for she lay back quite quietly, and might have been dead but for the fitful quivering of fingers. What if the carefully rehearsed comedy should fail? She really was very imbecile and weak, ripe for the scythe of the reaper. The days of remorseful regret must be past long since, her senses blunted to aught but a craving for liquor.

Well, the hours had crawled away. The suspense of the conspirators would soon be relieved, as to whether there was anything to be gleaned from Pentecost. The house was ghastly in its stillness. In spite of the over-warmed and fetid atmosphere of her chamber, the old woman shuddered. A dreadful emptiness was on her, an inward griping like a grasp of ice. She writhed upwards on her cushions, and, supported on skinny elbows, glared hungrily at the empty bottle. "Not a drop, not a single drop! How cruel!" she whispered; and was about to subside again, when her haggard eyes rested on a scrap of paper on the table. She looked at it with lacklustre gaze that saw nothing but a square of white; but gradually the sense of what was written there dawned on her

clouded intellect in words of fire, and, clinging to the arms of her chair, she gazed, fascinated, trembling. She passed an aspen claw over her damp brow. There was no delusion. The words were plain enough. "I told you I would return to where you saw me first.—ROGER." Roger return! In truth he had said so years and years ago; but he was dead—dead, secure under the sod. She had reason to know that he was dead. What could this mean then? No living person knew of Roger, except herself and Vere. She had guarded the portals of the secret—with what difficulty Heaven knew; but she had guarded them. Who, then, could— Was it a warning of her own demise? Had he whom she had injured so returned to earth to fetch her, to drag her up to judgment to answer for what she had done?

All this passed through the old lady's distempered brain as she glared at the scrap of white. Roger! She would not go with him! No; she would not! Help, help! for a sliding soul just on the edge of the abyss. Pentecost wrung her hands; but no one hearkened to her weak strugglings, the murmur of her feeble anguish. How still and oppressive the night! The crone stumbled to her feet, her brain swimming with the effort, and tottered to the casement. A humming of moths as they boomed against the glass, striving to reach the candle and compass their own death; the Fosse glittering in the moon-

beams like a silver thread; high banks of heavy foliage like hearse-plumes. "Abigel! Come hither!" Why did she abandon the helpless grandaunt who had been so good to her? An overpowering sense of solitude flooded the old woman's soul with horror—unnerved as she was, awakened out of a long lethargy. She sat down on the window-seat to think. "He said he would return, and I gibed at him. He never, never came! Has he come now from beyond the grave? No, no. The dead ride fast, straight on, and never turn—never, for the universe is endless! 'Tis but a nervous attack, due to a want of sustenance. To think that I, strong-minded Pentecost, should shrink and shrivel thus!" Summoning to her aid her shreds of ravelled strength, she rose, strong now, and taking a candle, glided swiftly out along the corridor. Since oblivion was denied, she would look into this, and satisfy her mind by going to the place of tryst. She was no craven, not she, though very ill. If he were come again, she would meet him as she had done before, with upbraiding sneers. How he had supplicated and besought, as she ejected him, for the wherewithal to live! Why should he live? What she had done before she'd do again, she would; for her soul was not her own—'twas given away long since to one she had loved too well. Noiselessly she twisted the handle of the door and entered the library; and with a long, low cry shrank back against the wall,

dropping her candlestick. "That thing so carefully destroyed!" she gasped. "Roger—you—where are you? Not here, I know, not here; for I saw you safely buried six feet beneath the sod in the churchyard at Crows' Liberties. You cannot leave your nameless grave! I tell you I will not go; I will not! Though all the fiends in hell—— George, George! 'Twas for your sake! Help, help! he's there! Do not——" The old woman cowered on the floor, a scared and quivering heap, with blue lips foaming, eyes bursting from their sockets, and the concealed spectators looked on aghast with fear. Who could have supposed that she would have been so convulsed; that one so frail could be so violently torn? Sure she must be seized with epilepsy! They were about to emerge from ambush, when Pentecost staggered to her full, gaunt height, swayed to and fro as if wrestling with an unseen enemy, and, crying aloud with a despairing shriek, flung her withered arms into the air, and fell prostrate on the boards upon her face.

CHAPTER V.

A PILGRIMAGE TO THE WOLDS.

THE miserable hag was borne to her chamber and put to bed, and while remorseful Abigel applied restoratives, the other two sinners stood by, extremely sheepish. Pray Heaven they had not killed the crone among them, with their precious stratagem ! 'Tis ill playing pranks upon aged women. If he were only sure she would not be defunct ere he returned, Mr. Kimpton would speed to the village and purchase the most expensive brandy to make up for the trick. She was not going to die—not at present, at least ; for her flickering pulse grew stronger : with heaving spasms she fetched her labouring breath. The blacksmith went off, therefore, and came panting back, and the blue lips opened by instinct to receive the reviving draught. It would not do for Madam Smalley to find herself surrounded by prying eyes when she recovered. Cy and Kimpton had better go and conceal the blessed stone again, not within the house, but where it could easily be found when wanted. For convenience' sake

it would be well to have a tracing of that stone ; would Mr. Kimpton kindly make himself responsible and see to that as soon as the cousins were gone ?

Listless no longer, Miss Rowe threw off numbed sloth, resumed her pristine energy, ordered the burly men about with domineering finger as was her charming wont, and settled the plan of the campaign. Pentecost was to be told she had had a fit ; that, left alone, she had gone groping among the passages, and, tumbling over something in the dark, had fallen on her head. Returning to her old habits, she would soon be reduced again to a comatose condition as of yore, and the little *contres* would be forgotten. Then the cousins would be off—the sooner the better—to take advantage of information gained ; for the hag had let drop a hint, as they had hoped, of which it behoved them to make the most. She had said something about Crows' Liberties. Nor Cy nor Abigel had ever heard of such a spot, but the astute Kimpton fortunately remembered that there was a village of the name, somewhere on the eastern side of the county, where sheep were gathered to be shorn in the barren and deserted Wolds. Thither, then, would the cousins make a pilgrimage so soon as grandam was herself. But grandam revenged herself by declining for a while to recover. One access of delirium followed closely on another, during the brief intervals between which the crone lay speechless, gazing with

furtive and suspicious glances at her attentive niece. Once she asked a feeble question as to why she was lying there—so fluttering a question that it could scarce take form or sound—and the story of the fit having been related, she again became silent, apparently satisfied. But her mind was awake and working. The village doctor came and chatted, but she took no heed of his babble. It was lamentable, he declared, that once respected and respectable ladies should take to drink. She had sunk into a piteous condition, was verging on D.T. How a fastidious and delightful young lady could have endured to stay so long with one of her evil habits among the bats and rats, he was at a loss to comprehend ; but some women were even more angelic than the sex, as a body, was known to be, and it had been truly heroic of Miss Rowe to give up London and its joys to attend on an idiotic relative. These civil turns of rhetoric were bitter to Abigel. Since her retreat from the metropolis, she had looked after her aunt to the extent of supervising the proceedings of the rustic. She could not prevent her from drinking without using force, and was glad she had not tried to coerce her, since the results of temporary sobriety were so disastrous. But she objected to praise that was not due, and she certainly had not left her adopted home in town for the purpose of nursing Pentecost. What did the doctor advise ? she asked,

cutting him short in his flowers of speech. Well, really, he scarcely knew what to advise. Madam Smalley was always—so the village gossips said—a little mad, with magnificent ideas as to her own prominence above other folk. She had lived her own solitary life, and gone her “ain gait,” allowing no one to interfere with her. Well, she must go on as before. There was nothing else for it. To remove the brandy bottle suddenly would be to kill her; so she must be permitted access to it in moderation, though, really, if something did take her off it would be the better for the community at large. So said the doctor, and bowing, went his way. And Cy and Abigel, consulting with closed doors, as a betrothed couple may do without impropriety, perceived that grandam was not long for this world; that the flickering flame might go out at any moment without warning, and that they would be wise to make their preparations. Pentecost’s death would be a signal for open war on the part of Lord Osmington. No doubt of that. Neither Abigel nor Cy would be allowed to penetrate any more within the grounds of Battle Magna; but that would signify little, for all that was to be found there had been discovered, and as for the future, they had settled to go to London. The monument must make a journey to the forge. In Kimpton’s charge it would be secure, and could be produced by him at any

time. The next thing to be done was to proceed to Crows' Liberties, and cross-question the oldest inhabitants. Pentecost could safely be left for a couple of days under the charge of the rustic. The doctor would look in, and Kimpton, to see that all was right.

The cousins took the coach to York, then journeyed eastward over the great crescent of chalk hills which closes in the vast arena between Flamborough Head and the Humber. As they proceeded, they were struck by the deserted condition of the district, which for miles and miles was nothing but an immense unenclosed sheepwalk, encumbered by no fences, bisected by few roads—a wide expanse of green, low swelling like the summer sea, with scarce a habitation visible. Here and there were clumps of trees marking where once the stag and the wild boar had been chased among the woods; here and there a tumulus or a line of earthworks, haven of refuge in olden times for men and cattle, during the frequent forays of the borderers. Suddenly, without warning, the travellers would come upon a grassy precipitous hollow, so deep and steep as to check the boldest rider, at the bottom of which would lurk a nest of cottages, buried away from hum of men within a verdant well, upon whose sharp and precipitous sides the cloud-flecked sky appeared to rest. The narrowest of sheep-tracks meandered over the far-spreading green, as though

some caterpillar had been crawling there and left a silver trail; while away to the west, York Minster reared its head like a towering sentinel, and to the east a pale blue line was faintly visible, which told of the Northern Ocean.

“What could have induced them to settle in such a desert?” Abigel exclaimed. “There’s nothing alive, but rooks and sheep and jackdaws. Did they turn shepherds?”

“Here would we have taken our farm, dear Abby,” Cyrus whispered, with sly malice, “and have lived happy ever after, if your ladyship had not changed your mind.”

His companion frowned. If we immolate ourselves, surrender to despair; vow that, as only one creature in the universe has the good taste to care for us, we will even throw ourselves away on him as a great favour—it is only proper that the fortunate wight should be fully conscious of his good fortune, and gratefully humble to boot. Cy took the thing much too quietly. The severance was complete between himself and his past life. But it was an immense relief to Abigel to feel that it was not her doing; that he might return to the old Adam if he would; that he was not tied and bound by oaths, which, being sworn, he would, of course, be secretly anxious to break. Abigel would have had him in a perpetual condition of bubbling gratitude, and yet she would

not. As usual, our wayward heroine was unable to say what she really wanted ; and the humiliating perception of this condition of mind made her angry with herself. This, you will say, is quite untrue to nature. Young ladies always know their minds. They never jibb and skip aside from their own happiness ; never say "No" when they think they mean "Yes," then go and weep in their bedrooms, because their tongues have spoken otherwise than was intended. They never accept Tom and wish they had not, because, all things considered, they think they prefer Peter ; and after shilly-shallying withdraw the promise, and end quite unaccountably by marrying Jim. They never pine after the moon, and, finding the luminary out of reach, accept a modest cheese, which at least is good to eat, considering themselves the while in the light of ill-used martyrs. They know themselves to be made of such superior clay as to be worthy of a Royal Duke ; but, as the Royal Duke does not happen to come forward, they espouse the butter-man, and, the first throes of disappointment over, settle down comfortably enough, and find him by no means despicable. But then they wish the vendor of "Dosset" to keep that mythical royal personage before his eyes, and be in a constant state of beatific admiration in that they took him instead. He must never be allowed to forget his inferiority. Abigel would have been vastly indignant had anybody suggested that, after all, she was not so

sorely put upon. That halcyon time in the metropolis tended, naturally, to unsettle her mind and warp her judgment. She did not realize then that, nameless *protégée* of a libertine lord, none were likely to wish for her *pour le bon motif*, and that ultimately to be led to the hymeneal altar by an excellent young person in her own station of life was not like being led to the stake. True, his profession was objectionable ; but we can't have everything. The first prizes in the lottery fall to few ; lucky are those who do not draw blanks. Only one fairy prince married into Cinderella's family, and I dare say that her next-door neighbour and playmate was obliged to be content with the dustman. Cy was young, healthy, tolerably good-looking, sweet-tempered, and prepared to kiss the ground his pretty cousin walked upon. Sure to be his wife was not so hard a fate ? What if, when grandaunt died, she should be still unmarried ? She might or might not have a store in a stocking, part of which would fall to her niece. If not, penury and starvation ; nothing else. Perhaps Miss Rowe was really conscious of all this when she made up her mind to accept Cy, and determined that he was to stick to his profession ; though she buried it out of sight. Perhaps she knew that she was fortunate in that so honest a fellow should want a portionless waif, and was rendered cross by the thought that, after all her parade, she was making no sacrifice at all.

That might be so or not, but she was in no mood for pleasantry. If we are going to contract a union which may be worldly-wise and prudent, but which leaves a good deal to be desired in the way of romance, we cannot be expected to turn up our eyes with rapture. It is sufficient if we are composedly content and manfully determined to make the best of it. Abigel, therefore, resented Cy's complacent allusions to the future ; was full of the matter in hand ; astonished at the nature of the country she was traversing, and bursting with surmises as to what they would discover—marvelling whether this journey was to be crowned with success, or whether the road would end in a blank wall, to pierce which would defy even the penetrating optics of Kimpton, the ingenious blacksmith.

At last the travellers reached Crows' Liberties, a dismal spot near the source of the river Hull, a few miles inland from the sea. If the fugitive James Christopher really left Ireland with his family, as the lapis-lazuli letter said, he could not have chosen a bleaker place—one where he could have better hopes of lying *perdu*, out of the grip of Justice. There were two or three straggling cottages, some supported by beams in guise of crutches ; a farmstead, which, in the absence of any rival, endeavoured to look like a manorial residence ; a row of hovels to seaward, much like the smoky huts of the barbarous people

who, centuries before, had fed their herds and chipped their flint arrowheads along this gloomy coast ; a little to the left a circle of aged hawthorns ; in the midst a crazy chapel—and that was all.

“ Whatever there may exist to be discovered here,” laughed Cy, “ should be obtainable in five minutes, for there cannot be more than a dozen people in the place.”

“ Pray Heaven, Lord Osmington has not been before us ! ” returned Abigel, in tribulation. “ The search on this spot looks little promising.”

Warned of the inhospitable nature of the district, the cousins had slept at Garton-on-the-Wolds, and reached the goal of their hopes about midday. The first thing was to seek for the parson, and search the register for Roger’s death ; for though it was assumed that he had dwelt here, they knew not, of course, in which house, or what was his way of life. Was it possible that any one in this lowly place could want a manservant ? The chapel looked as if it had not been opened for twenty years, at least. The roof was covered with moss and mould—in one place was open to the weather. The churchyard was unenclosed ; a few stones peeped out of the sod, sacred to no man’s memory. Where was the parsonage ? Sure none of these tumble-down hovels could hold the parson ? The travellers knocked at the lozenged window of the nearest, which was presently opened by a faded man, who seemed disconcerted by the

apparition of strangers. Where was the parsonage ? Was the clergyman likely to be at home ? If the faded man would kindly inquire at once, the visitors would pay him handsomely. The faded man, recovering from the effect of strange faces, was tickled by an idea, and laughed.

“ Ask him at once ! ” he echoed. “ Parson lives a matter of seven mile away ; rides over of a Sunday if it’s fine ; if not, ‘tisn’t worth his while. Parson lives at Frodingham—down there. If you keep S.W., you’ll likely come on it.”

The faded man pointed vaguely across the moor, in the direction of a gnarled tree on which a raven sat. Beyond the sable fowl, nothing in particular was visible. To go pounding off S.W. in search of Frodingham, with no yokels on the way from whom to ask the road, was hopeless. It had been a matter of congratulation ever to have reached Crows’ Liberties at all. It was not convenient to make the attempt, the gentleman explained, as he and the lady had other things to do than go capering about the Wolds, as the Israelites wandered in the desert. They were there in the first instance to examine the parish registers. The clerk probably lived less than seven miles away ; perhaps for a consideration the faded man would summon him. The latter laughed again, a slow and bovine laugh—a whimsical faded man with a tinge of quaint dry humour.

"That will I," he chuckled, "for I be he ; but as for the registers, oh lawk, oh lawk, how should I know ? Parson keeps the key of vestry, but I doubt if there's much there but rubbish."

"What ! no registers ? "

"There are registers, or used to be, somewhere."

Abigel took alarm at once.

"Has any one been tampering with them ?" she inquired so sternly as again to tickle the clerk.

"Oho !" he roared. "Yes, lady. I think the mice have done summat in that way. 'Tain't the interest of any one else."

"No person—no gentleman," Miss Rowe proceeded ; but she was abruptly stopped by the elbow of her future spouse, who marked growing wonder on the bucolic visage, and saw the imprudence of sowing suspicion in his uncorrupted intellect.

"Not as I know of," grunted the faded man. "I can't see what folks want with registers—a heap of trouble. When you're dead, you're dead, and that's all about it."

It was evident that the clerk was a practical person, who loved his ease, and who was also out at elbows. Cyrus, placing a guinea on the window-sill, announced that the glittering coin should be the clerk's, if he would stir his stumps and be off after the keys. The lady and gentleman were in a hurry. Surelie ! that he would for such a guerdon. His prad was

grazing yonder—that strawberry quadruped—he would saddle him in a trice; but it was only fair for the gentleman to know that the church contained little beside mice and cobwebs.

Left alone, the cousins looked at each other despondingly. Registers were evidently unfashionable in this remote place, where service was sometimes read if it was fine. Now that they were here, of course they would look up the registers; but it would have been better, perhaps, to have gone straight to the point, and have cross-questioned the clerk about Roger Jarvis. Where the population was so small, every one was sure to know all about everybody else, and information of some sort might be obtained. Pentecost had certainly said something about a nameless grave at Crows' Liberties. If Roger was buried here, she was right enough, for all the graves were nameless. They wandered round the crazy chapel, peered through the gaping chinks of the door.

"This must be the vestry. We'll know all about it in the twinkling of a bedpost," observed Cyrus; and, placing his broad shoulder against the woodwork, he gave a sturdy push. The door yielded at once, and Cy fell sprawling on his back, amid such a cloud of dust as half suffocated Belzoni when he sat on the mummy of Cheops. "Well," he grumbled, "if the secrets of Crows' Liberties are no better guarded, we'll soon find what we want."

So soon as the atmosphere was cleared, Abigel commenced eagerly to search. What damp! What destruction! What crumbling decay! A rush-bottomed chair; a dirty surplice, and a pair of rusty spurs, hanging on a nail; a table minus a leg; on it a broken pipe and some tobacco-ash; a cupboard in a corner, ajar. Feverishly, Abigel made for the cupboard. A volume of Jeremy Taylor, a book of certificates of birth. Here was a register! Tremblingly Miss Rowe attempted to drag it down; but, too heavy for her slender wrists, it fell, and gaping, displayed a foul inside, like that of a whitened sepulchre. A pretty book of registry! As the clerk hinted, mice had mumbled its interior; rats had tasted of its nastiness, and spat it out; worms had scored the leaves; stout moribund bluebottles had retired within the covers, and, decently concealed from view, had shuffled off their coil. It was an entomological pantheon, replete with long-legged notabilities; and, with a cry of disgust, Abigel threw herself upon the rush-bottomed chair and burst into a flood of tears.

Cy, with hands in pockets, looked gravely down at lovely woman in distress, and waited till the paroxysm was past. If lovely woman will go on forlorn hopes, there is sure to be trouble; and when a prey to discomfiture and wrath, she invariably stamps her little feet and pants with spasmodic sobs. Under such circumstances there is nothing for mere man to do but

to be patient and hold his tongue. The province of lovely woman is to loll on cushions and be worshipped. If she elects to career over the Wolds for the behoof of the indifferent, she will receive buffets on her sweet cheek, then set the floodgates open ; and mere man, while admitting that she is rightly served, can only be regrettfully silent.

Besides the entomological pantheon and the volume from which the parson borrowed his discourses, there was absolutely nothing in the cupboard except layers of dust, an accumulation of years. Some of the great-grandchildren of the notabilities crept about in corners, wagging fierce antennæ in that the last home of their ancestors should be rudely desecrated. No marriages, and no deaths—not even outer covers appertaining to such tomes. The clerk was not in the wrong. Who could possibly care about the life or death records of those who inhabited Crows' Liberties ? Any man or woman who could consent to spend a lifetime in such a place deserved to be speedily forgotten.

Presently Abigel's spasm was over, and gnawing her handkerchief, she turned her red eyes dolefully towards her cousin. Of course he thought her a little fool, she whimpered, even a little cranky, might be. Well, it was for better or worse that he was to clasp her to his breast. In years to come he must never, never twit her with insanity. She was a poor, poor ignorant girl, who had tr-tr-tried to act for the

best, and it was not her f-f-fault if nothing to which she put her hand ever t-t-turned out well. There was nothing to be discovered in this ridiculous wilderness, she sobbed. They had better give it up and go and look after grandam.

“By all means,” replied dutiful Cyrus, with alacrity. If she was ready to abandon the quest for good and all, so much the better, for it was very tiresome. He was only anxious himself about it in order to prevent——; but that was all over, and everything was going swimmingly. If she were tired of it and ready to go, so was he; for it was indeed a melancholy spot, and the sooner they were out of it the better.

. Then—so inexplicable and tantalizing are the ways of lovely woman—short-tempered little Abigel turned round and rent her cousin. He was a selfish wretch, who cared for nought except his own comfort, and ought to be ashamed of heartless indifference.

This was too much. Tart Miss Rowe would soon be Mrs. Smalley, and it did not behove her to cast false accusations at her betrothed. It was not for him to recapitulate the details of long and faithful service, but it would never do for her to be able to say that he snubbed her in her whim. It behoved him to prevent possibilities of reproach in the future. Whether he cared about it individually was neither here nor there; but he then and there vowed that he had changed his mind, and swore a fearful oath, that

in this delightful spot he and she would remain until they had discovered something, or were convinced that there was nothing to be discovered.

Abigel liked him much better when he spoke thus, with grave and virile determination, than when he grovelled and dubbed her angel. So, beaming again through the April shower, she held out her nut-brown hand, and he was more exercised than ever as to what to make of his puzzle.

"As you will, Cy dear," she replied demurely. "You're master, you know. But here comes that stupid old clerk on his strawberry prad. He can't have been seven miles already."

The faded old man, puffing and blowing, explained that he had met the parson's shepherd, and that from him he had learnt that parson was gone to York and would not be back for a week. "It don't matter, it seems, though," he continued with a loud guffaw; "for I see you've helped yourselves, and trust you've found what you sought."

"You know perfectly well that there was nothing to be found," interrupted Cyrus brusquely. "This destruction of records is a disgrace to both you and the parson, to say nothing of the archbishop—not that he troubles much, I dare say, about you hermits in the Wolds. But do you mean seriously to tell us that there are no registers of deaths or marriages—nothing but that loathsome cover?"

"Not that I know of," replied the faded man. "Afore my time it was sexton kept 'em—leastways his wife, until she died, which she did some years before him. Old Tabitha Jarvis kept 'em tidy, and him too. No easy job. Little wonder it killed her."

"Tabitha Jarvis!" ejaculated Abigel, with heightened colour.

"Yes; Tabitha, wife of Roger, the sexton. I should remember him, for, though he'd little to eat, he was uncommon big, and no mistake; and when he died had a coffin big enough for two. An unlucky feckless chap was Roger Jarvis."

"Roger Jarvis!" echoed Abigel, with clasped hands.
"Where was he buried?"

"Yonder," replied the man, with a touch of pleasure, in that the travellers should be inquisitive about such a curiosity in corpses. "Under the sun-dial. There never was a stone; for he was the last, and it's ill leaving such things to strangers."

"The last? He had no children, then?"

"Oh yes; two girls, who went to York as house-servants. They were fond of ribbon and finery; and this place *is* a trifle dull."

"Only two daughters?"

"They went to the bad, poor giddy things. There was a lad, too, but he 'listed early and went to the Ingies, I was told, as food for powder; and went to the dogs too, I suppose. Better that nor starve."

Abigel was so moved that she could not speak, but stood with both hands clasped upon her bosom, changing from red to white. Cyrus, resolved as he was to penetrate to the bottom, drew inspiration from her eyes and continued to ask idle questions.

"Is Jarvis a common name hereabouts?" he inquired innocently.

"No," returned the clerk. "These folks were Irish, I believe. Yonder's the cottage where they lodged; that one with the sharp gable and the lattice window. There's a rare view of the sea from the top of that hill."

Cy thanked the man and dismissed him, and the cousins strolled up the incline to admire the promised prospect. It was exasperating. They had actually found Roger at last, but merely in hearsay fashion. No record of his marriage or his death. Would any court accept such evidence? And yet, fitting two and two together, there was no doubt as to its veracity. It was satisfactory to know that Roger's son had 'listed for a soldier. The next step was to inquire at the house where the outcasts had roosted. A picturesque looking abode enough, though small and dilapidated. Although the family was dispersed, there was some one, perchance, within who would remember them and give further details. It was worth trying, at all events, determined as they were to leave no stone unturned. Cy went to the door, and rapped

with his whip. No reply. He turned the handle and was about to enter, when some one rose from a low settle and approached the intruder. Both the cousins uttered a cry; for the man standing in the doorway, sketch-book in hand, was no other than Leoline.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SEXTON'S DWELLING.

LEO's pale face flashed with glad surprise when he perceived who the tourists were that had invaded his retreat; and an answering flash cut through the soul of Cy, as he looked with suspicion on his cousin. But her tell-tale visage answered for itself. There was no collusion. The meeting was not pre-arranged. "What are you doing in this dismal place? What brought you here?" Such were the questions asked of one and the other; and Leo, while Abigel explained the purport of her visit, seemed annoyed. "Still on that hopeless chase!" he exclaimed impatiently. "I tell you candidly that I have quite given it up. Indeed, I wrote to my mistress a short time ago, stating that nothing came of the advertisement, and that it is foolish to fret away our lives after a chimera. I cannot stay on for ever, hoping and expecting that which will not take place. She was very kind to me when I sorely needed kindness, and my place is by her side. Ambrosia begs me

to go, and add my feeble influence to hers. 'Tis she needs kindness, now, poor lady—and friends too, if all I hear is not the invention of the evil one!"

"Going away after all!" ejaculated Abigel, growing white; and Cy could not help adding sulkily, "You're a pretty one to work for!"

"Yes," he said; "I shall join the Princess at Naples; and as it may be long ere I return, I've come to take a last look at the dear old north, where I was born and bred. I'm making a tour afoot, and intended to surprise you all, by pouncing suddenly on Stratton. See these sketches. They'll serve to remind me of this bleak grey coast as we float on the blue Mediterranean. This is Spurn Head at Humber's mouth; and this Withernsea; and this Owthorne, where the sea has lapped and lapped into the domain of men till the church has toppled and the shore is strewn with coffins. A forbidding coast, and yet I love it. This one is Mapleton. Ah me!"

"What of Mapleton?" asked Abigel, marking the sigh.

"'Tis there she died," Leo replied softly. "I sought out the barn; here is a drawing of it. I knew it again at once, and 'tis well I did, for none in the place recalled the circumstance."

"And after what she said, you turn your back upon her and your ancestors," Abigel remarked, with a touch of disdain. "Oh, Leo, it is very wrong!"

"The farther I am away, the easier it will to be forget!" sighed Leo. "Here there is nothing but worry and delusive hope. When you cross-questioned those almshouse women, I half believed that it would all come right; and then, as usual, the mirage vanished, leaving the prospect more drear. Believe me, Abigel, 'tis you who are wrong, though I love you very much for your faithful energy and kindness. I've thought it all over," he added gloomily, "and I feel that if I do not go away 'twill be the worse for me."

Miss Rowe looked frightened, and glanced at Cy. For her sake 'twas best that he should go, but why for his? Yes; since the register was gone, which they had come to seek, perchance it would be wise in him to depart and seek his mistress. But there was no reason for the look of gratification on Cy's face, as he flicked the flowers that grew at the cottage door. How very provoking Cy could be! Was he such a gaby as to be jealous, when he held her promise?

Presently Cy observed with composure, "You may well thank her, Mr. Jarvis; for never did little woman work so hard. She's got the matter nearly clear; but, as your honour is so indifferent, she can let it drop now with a sound conscience. That she has so far succeeded will at least be a comfort to herself, sir, which will comfort me, since she's soon to be my wife."

A shade passed over the brow of the young poet.
“Your wife!” he faltered, with a strange dismay.
“It is settled? I suspected this.”

Leoline tried hard to look pleased, but it was a failure. Although we may sensibly conclude that a desired prize may never be ours, and give up thinking of it, yet does the pang come sharply when we see it won by some one else.

“Yes!” sighed Abigel. “It is settled, quite settled.”

Here was a singular way of discussing approaching nuptials, when bells would vie in joyousness with the jocund rat-tat of marrowbones and cleavers. There was no more delight depicted on the features of the trio than if they had been conversing of a funeral. Indeed, it appeared a matter of emulation as to which of the three should seem most glum.

Leo muttered to himself, “What do I do here? Yes; I must go.”

As for Abigel, she was frightened by her sensations; for, so soon as she found herself again under the spell of the blue eyes, the battlements and ramparts which she had so carefully been building melted into vapour, and the prospect of becoming a bruiser’s bride appeared intolerable.

Poor Cyrus, on his side, was disconsolate; for the way in which she said, “It is settled,” struck him like a douche of iced water. The tone was one of resigna-

tion and regret, rather than of content. Wincing, he gazed at his affianced, and she smiled up at him. It was of her will and choice that she was to be his, but the old warning of Thomas Cribb rang like a knell in his ears. “It will never answer,” that worthy man had said. Was he who loved her so to make her life a misery? It would not bear thinking of. Only just now, before they came on Leoline, she was quite pleased, and accepted with admirable propriety the edict of her future lord. Ah, well! as she had remarked, *it was settled*. He would do his honest best to make her life a not unpleasant one, so there was no use in going back on that. He was painfully convinced, though, that the less the scribbling young dreamer met his wife the better it would be for the peace of the *ménage*; and a gleam traversed his intelligence to the effect that it was well she did not insist upon his leaving his profession. If they could succeed in placing this young gentleman upon his proper pinnacle, as seemed far from impossible now, the breach between those two would be made wider than ever were he to continue to be, in name at least, a pugilist; and then he chid himself for the unworthy thought. How base to drag her down in order to remove her farther from his rival! And yet, if she was to be his wife, it was surely his bounden duty to her as well as to himself to remove his precious chattel out of the vortex of temptation. But perchance he was

self-deceived. This fitful fever of hope and fear was but the result of suspense. To possess such a chattel was such undeserved bliss, that he might well be pardoned for doubting the consummation of his happiness and seeing dangers when there were none. When the knot was tied, and she was his very own, he could afford to laugh at the hot and cold accesses of the past. She was certainly quite lukewarm about this quest an hour since, when she proposed to return to Battle Magna; and then, a minute later, she had been so cross! Riddles are wearisome things. He was not good at sounding the depths of female motive. His resolution had been a good one, namely, to go through with the matter to the end, which she had found so entertaining, in order that later she might not be able to reproach herself; and here they were all three by chance together on the spot, so the present was the time for action. Between them they must do something decisive.

Leoline was amazed when Abigel unfolded her budget, and he saw how link was joined to link; and the expression of dismay upon his features gave place to quite another look of hope, which, happily for himself perhaps, Cy was unable to interpret. So the stone was actually found, and they stood, at this very moment, on the threshold of old Roger's abode? Was his mammy toiling thitherward all those years agone, that she should have died so near? Was she bent on

finding another certificate and placing it before Lord Osmington (confident that he would do what was right) along with her marriage lines, for her little boy's sake? That must have been it. Poor soul! 'Twas as well she perished when she did, for it would have been bitterly trying to have discovered nothing.

"But we must discover something," cried sturdy Cyrus. "We know exactly how things were; but want a proof, and that proof we'll find if we drag down this crippled tenement."

Leoline had stopped at this house on account of the view, and was settling down to do a sketch when Cy and Abigel appeared. Its occupant had kindly trudged to the farm to buy some milk for his repast, and would be back anon. Yes, there she was, climbing the hill with a can, stopping now and again for breath. A dame in years. So much the better. If the clerk was a faded but jocular person, this dame was nervous and whimpering, and appeared quite scared by the unexampled spectacle of three strangers on her doorstep at one time. Deary me! Would they step inside? It was neat and clean, if homely. There was bread and a bit of cheese and milk, and if the lady would bide a bit, she would make some scones on the griddle.

Miss Rowe, recovering her spirits—resolved to show no wounds—begged that she would not put herself about. The milk was opportune, for in this little

basket were provisions—cold meat, some tea. If the dame would heat some water, the travellers would be luxuriously provided. While the woman placed some sticks together and kindled a fire, Abigel observed her narrowly. A woman of about sixty, comely and buxom—a decent body. Could she have occupied the house whilst Roger lived here? Was she a relation of his or Tabitha's? One of the daughters, perhaps, who had been giddy, and gone wrong, and been reclaimed. Carelessly, for the purpose, apparently, of idle chatter, Miss Rowe began to ask questions. It was a dull place. Ah, deary me, it was! Poor folks must not be pickers and choosers, but accept their lot. She had dwelt in this hamlet for—Lord knows how long—ever since she was quite small, beginning as farm wench, then changing to household labour. In this very house she had spent more years than she could count. A nice house if humble, but awful dull o' winters since the old folks passed away. Old folks? Her father and mother, of course. No; her master and mistress, or rather her old friends, since being so poor they had given her bite and sup in lieu of wages. Mrs. Tabitha was shrill and angular, her temper soured, poor thing, by misery; but Gaffer Roger was always patient—never complaining or giving trouble—would go out and dig a grave all weathers without grumbling, and the winds here in winter were like knives. That's how he was carried off, and much

regretted ; for he was good and simple, if too weak to do successful battle against a violent inflammation of the lungs.

" That was the poor old sexton, was it ? Pity he hadn't an assistant," quoth artful Abigel, while her two companions listened.

" Old ! not a bit old," retorted the dame, " though he looked old, his hair being white. Why, when that dratted inflammation took him, he was only forty-four."

" When was that ? "

" In 1792—a dreadful November, with snow and sleet, and farmer Jennings to be buried. He came back shivering, and took to his bed, and never got up again, except to get under the sod, poor fellow ! Every one was sorry when he went, except himself ; he was glad enough to go, being so wretched."

" 1792 ! That was the year of your birth, Leoline ! " Abigel exclaimed. " And since then you've lived here all by yourself ? "

" All by myself—doing a bit of sewing for the folks around, and keeping the wolf from the door as best I could. But where all are poor we help each other, for we all know too well the feel of a heavy hand ! "

" Tell me," Abigel pursued, speaking very distinctly, " what did the sexton do besides digging graves ? In these remote places every one does a host of things."

" Do ! Nothing, poor soul ; his health was never strong, and he so weighed down with cares ! "

"Did he not keep the church books?"

The woman looked up like a startled hare. "The church books!" she faltered. "They all tumbled to pieces in the curate's time, who lived here once, though there was nought for him to do. And Roger was angry, I mind, and so was Mrs. Tabitha, when the curate's lady took the crumpled leaves to light the fire; and he said it was a shame, and took the books away from her."

"She lit the fire with the registers!" cried Abigel.

"Ay, did she, and what good else, a parcel of litter! Madam Tabitha was for doing the same at first, but he was stern with her, the only time he ever was, she said, in all their married life. To please him, she made me sew them up as neat as I knew how."

"Then, thanks to Roger, they exist still?" Abigel cried, with such a ring of pleasure that the woman, taking alarm, withdrew within her shell, and, busying herself with household cares, declined to say any more.

"It is right that you should know," Cyrus interrupted, "that a great deal may turn upon those papers. It is possible that this gentleman here may give you a hundred guineas in exchange for some of them. When Roger went under the sod, as you put it, what became of the books you sewed so carefully?"

"Deary me!" wailed the woman, dropping her

scones, and sitting on the floor in consternation. "A hundred guineas! Niver have seen half so much in all my life!"

"Well then, you shall now, if fairly earned."

"Oh, deary me, deary me! He said they ought to be kept," the woman continued, locking her hands together, "but I thought him daft, and that when he was dead it didn't matter. Tabitha always said so, and so did the curate's lady, and sure a humble body like me may be excused for doing like my betters."

"You have destroyed them?" cried Abigel.

"They are gone," admitted the woman, all of a tremble.

"All? every one?" demanded Cyrus, while Leo sat like a statue, as blanched and motionless.

"The covers are somewhere," the woman said, brightening, "with a scrap or two. Perhaps you'll find there what you want."

A book of marriages and a book of deaths—the covers of the volumes missing from the church—as empty if not as loathsome as the entomological pantheon. A few ragged and torn pages yet remained, but nothing that could be of the slightest use to our three travellers. They sat in a circle, utterly despondent. 'Tis vexing when you've raised a house of cards, if the placing of the roof should bring down the entire edifice. The situation was harrowing in the extreme, but there was no use in sitting there

like mourners at a burying. The cause of the trouble gave vent to a series of smothered outcries, like an Irish beldame at a wake. "Deary me! deary me!" What a provoking beldame! What is the use of lamentation? Let us bury our dead and be jovial.

So at least thought Cyrus, who was the first to recover. Even when baffled and discomfited, man must eat. The collation he had brought in a basket from Garton-on-the-Wolds, instead of being a banquet of triumph, was to be a commemorative repast of funeral baked meats. So much the worse. All had been done that was possible. 'Twas through no fault of theirs that failure instead of victory now crowned their efforts. "L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose." If we can't have things as we will, we must take things as they come, and make the best of them.

The food was spread upon the board, and as the trio discussed it, Cy and Leoline talked of their plans in low tones, while Abigel dropped salt tears upon her bread and butter. Yes, he would go and join the Princess—"was quite anxious to be off," Leo said. Reports were rife that she had fallen desperately in love with Murat, *le beau sabreur*, and that, deserted by her remnant of British following, she had fallen among foreign thieves and Philistines. Her page could not do much, but he might be privileged to defend her from foreign harpies and scoundrels. His life was empty, a very Sahara, with no rosy light on

the horizon. It would be well to be of some trifling use before he died, or at least to make the attempt. And Mr. Smalley was going to be married, was he? Well, he had the best wishes of the companion of his youth. A treasure was confided to his care. Leoline hoped he never would forget the value of the treasure. His accents were solemn, like those of a parent resigning his child.

Abigel sobbed so bitterly that she could not swallow. The baked meats were Dead Sea fruit, and stuck in her throat. The sympathetic and also weeping mistress of the cottage implored her to take some tea, and not take on. Another dish—it was so very soothing. As for herself, she was already vastly better, for tea was a rare luxury and calming to grief. A little more water in the pot. The kettle was burning to the touch, but here was a holder, made by her own fingers, ever so long since. Abigel drank the tea, but could eat nothing—not the merest morsel. It would have been in better taste if Cy had refrained from droning about his plans and way of life in the future to the unfortunate Leoline, who could have no plans of his own henceforth. The girl's brow darkened as she listened to the blundering of her affianced, and she twitched her fingers nervously as a help to the keeping of her temper. She took up the kettle-holder, a rough thing made out of an old petticoat, and fretfully picked the threads. It came to pieces under her

touch, and the stiffening peeped forth—a bit of paper folded square with writing on it. The word Hans fixed her attention. “What is this?” she murmured. “Hans—Hans Jarvis!” With hysterical movement she detached the paper from its woollen covering, and smoothed it on the table. It was one of the pages from the torn book, for the tear tallied with one of the abrasions. A certificate, yes; a certificate of birth—of the birth of Hans Jarvis, son of Roger Jarvis, late of Broagh in Ireland, and Tabitha, his wife!

They had it at last, the missing link! By a fortunate accident the particular page in question had been used to stuff a kettle-holder instead of to light a fire. The chain was complete now, and Leoline was Earl of Northallerton! In the revulsion from despondency to joy, Miss Rowe so far forgot herself as, sobbing out incoherent congratulations, to fling her arms around the young poet’s neck; and as he returned the embrace with a will, Cyrus looked grimly on. Now, just for once, but never more. Cy too was glad on his own account, for the wall was built, the coping placed. The baked meats were become a feast. Liberties are permitted in a saturnalia. He had learnt that in London. He was so pleased himself, reflecting dear Abby’s gladness, that he seized the new lord’s hand in his own great mawley, and gave it such a shake as caused it to sting again. The mistress of the cottage knew not which to do, whether to

cry or laugh. Only to think that Fortune should befriend her after all ! Whatever should she do with a hundred golden guineas ? The book and the torn leaf?—of course they might have them and welcome. So the handsome young gentleman was Roger's grandson, and Roger was himself an earl ! Deary, deary me ! How like a fairy tale ! Whoever could have dreamed of such a thing ? What a thousand pities the patient fellow had not survived to take his share of joy. But nothing ever did or could succeed with him. Some folk's career on earth is so uniformly black, so unchequered with any light, that sure they must have a high time of it on the next stage, or 'twould be most unfair. Roger, who had never injured a creature in his life, had reaped nothing but sorrow unalloyed. Maybe he was looking down at that minute and smiling his invisible congratulations to his lucky grandchild. And now she came to think of it, she had a box which had been Roger's, and which she had taken to herself as a kind of perquisite and memento of the deceased ; for had she not closed his eyes and laid him out, and no blood relation near ? 'Twas but a meagre thing, used by her as a workbox ; and whenever she used it, she always thought of Roger, and called a blessing on his memory.

Leoline took it up with something akin to awe. A small casket of ebony and ivory, with the family arms on the lid blazoned in colour. A maunch vert upon

a field or; the same design as on the seal his mother gave him. The cognizance of the Northallertons, the only relic left to the hapless fugitive in his banishment to remind him of what he had lost.

Io triumphe! Let the trumpet to the clarion speak! Beaming with joy, Miss Rowe resumed the command of the expedition, abdicated in despairing waywardness. The trio must return to Battle Magna, and, with helpful Kimpton's aid, marshal their forces to oust the usurper. Roger's housekeeper would have to journey up to London. She would not mind that, if amply paid. So must the clerk and the Stratton almshouse women and the monument. But the plotters must be very cautious, careful to make no false step. Would it be prudent, with so strong a hand, to show their cards to Pentecost? To make her understand that the game was played out, since they knew all? Assured of this, she would probably confess, which would simplify matters charmingly—not but what they held everything that was essential. Cy was for not troubling his grandam, but he was overruled; for, as Abigel cogently observed, the wicked old woman's soul had been long in travail, and 'twould be a kindness to allow her to repent and wash white her scarlet sins. If Cy was afraid to face her, Abigel was not. When was she ever afraid? She would go straight to her aunt and speak the truth, and see what came of it. But this deed of signal prowess was not re-

quired of her. When the party reached Stratton-on-the-Fosse, they found Kimpton awaiting them before his forge. Madam Pentecost Smalley had been taken with apoplexy, and, after lying some hours speechless, had gone to her account. What would my lord Osmington do now?

CHAPTER VII.

CLAREMONT.

If the wayward Abigel was unfortunate in her matrimonial prospects, her dear friend Charlotte seemed likely to fare better, in spite of papa's frowns. The Prince Regent could not forgive her conduct in the Orange fiasco, for to the mind of a Grand Signor the aggressive obstinacy of a minx is not to be pardoned. Time was going on, and it became imperative to settle her somehow. What was to be done with this bouncing woman? My lady Hertford still murmured over her tambour, "Find a husband;" and stout Telemachus grew quite angry with Mentor for suggesting the impossible. He declined to pit himself against his daughter any more; for it was undignified, and he knew by experience that he was sure to get the worst of it. She was terribly popular, too; for whenever she appeared in London, a mob pursued her carriage and would not cease hallooing until she kissed her fingers from the window. That mob was pestilent in its behaviour—always making itself objectionable one

way or another. T'other day it was corn laws and famine prices of bread ; now it was something else. Tired of pelting ministers, it began to attack the Regent again. The rapacious, discontented mob was for ever complaining, growling, and showing its teeth. Taxes, rent, tithes, were a grievous burthen, lamented the yokel. An over production of manufacturing labour, cried the town-bred grumbler, deprived of the war monopoly of a foreign market, was left on the hands of the producer, and the manufacturing capitalist was reduced to ruin. Could the Grand Signor help that ? The simple fact was, that the nation found itself compelled to pay the price of past military glory, and objected strongly to the process. An inclement season and a bad harvest filled up the measure of public calamity. Tumults, nocturnal outrages, were of daily occurrence. Distressed workmen threatened the rich and violated public decency, or appealed to public sympathy by harnessing themselves like brutes to waggons and drawing them from town to town.

Retrenchment and economy were bandied about and became cant phrases—two words which, as we have had occasion to perceive, did not exist in the vocabulary of the Regent. To one who never could be made to understand the value of money, such words meant nothing but discomfort. The only economy which he was privileged to see was his mother's, and the parsimony of the Queen commanded no respect, for indeed

she was a wrinkled old miser, and hoarded up her gold for no more useful purpose than kissing the dear guineas. Ministers were strongly opposed to economical reform, and abetted their lord and master. So when deputations came babbling of a pensioned oligarchy and remonstrating about corruption and a venal Parliament, his Royal Highness declined to listen, and, secluded within his own domains, invented new teapots and chandeliers, designing gorgeous decorations. But shut himself up as he might, domestic concerns would obtrude themselves within the sacred saloons of the Pavilion. The question was constantly obtruding itself, “What was to be done with the minx?” Set her up in an establishment of her own her father would not, at least until she was married; for he had sworn by all his gods that it should not be so, and it was not proper that a buxom hoyden should bring dishonour on the hairs of the paternal jasey. If one thing goes right in this world, another is certain to go wrong. The Dreadful Woman was misconducting herself abroad even more flagrantly than a fond husband had a right to hope. In that direction things were going well, and the sun of possible divorce began to glimmer through the clouds. The persons by whom she was surrounded were even lower than the boon companions of “*Trou Madame*;” and so great was the horror she inspired, that her arrival in a town was the signal for the flight of the

British consul, who straightway shut up his shutters, and locked his doors, and vanished into space. This was, of course, delightful, for it afforded a glimpse to foreigners of the long-endured sufferings of the Prince. His lips being hermetically sealed, it was satisfactory that she should show herself of her own accord in her true colours. But on this subject of divorce ministers were unsympathetic. An attempt to bring about such a consummation would be as dangerous now as in the past. Moreover, what would they do about witnesses ? Caroline was almost entirely surrounded by foreigners, and foreign witnesses would be looked on with suspicion by John Bull, within whose thick skull was an ineradicable conviction that all foreigners were murderers and liars, capable of any enormity. George refused to believe his ministers, and declared that his prospect of freedom grew brighter every day.

Other things, however, were not so rosy. It was a painful fact that his Royal Highness was no longer so young as he once had been (even he could not help perceiving it), and that the Nemesis of a wild youth hovered over his middle age. Though his legs were admittedly splendid, and the general effect of the frogged surtout vastly fine, there was a difficulty about the sylph-like symmetry of the too obtrusive royal bow-window, and his feet were attacked with gout. He was still a handsome man, with the same marvellously winning smile and

polished manners, but he was unable to conceal a certain wheeziness which recalled the breathing of a pet spaniel, and found it hard to be jocund and jaunty with a burning sensation in his toe. It was all very well to remark that cats are the handsomer for embon-point. Some people don't mind growing old, can look with placidity at silver hairs and resist the temptation of the tweezers ; to others, the march of the old gentleman with the scythe is an abiding horror. If he had no more to bear than that, you may say, he was unusually fortunate, since all must die in turn ; but, indeed, his gout was a sore trial, and soured the sweet temper which his associates justly admired. Gout or no gout, that question required an answer : What was to be done with regard to the great girl ? Lady Hertford urged in vain that the mob would be making a grievance of it soon, if the heiress presumptive were to remain a spinster. But papa was obdurate. If she would not take a husband of his choosing, he would wash his hands of the matter. This was very awkward, for Charlotte could not rush about by herself from Court to Court, and put herself up to auction like a wench at a statute fair. There is no knowing what catastrophes might not have arisen out of this difficulty if the puzzle had not fitted itself together of its own accord. What a relief it was to all parties concerned when the gay philanderer, who had flirted on Brighton beach and sighed and ridden

away after the usual fashion of deceivers, suddenly returned in the attitude of a genuine *prétendu*, and demanded the hand in marriage of the heiress presumptive to the Crown! He was just the very man. Well educated, thoughtful, with the melancholy beauty which Lord Byron had made the mode. Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, too, was a younger son—in this case an advantage—for nothing need draw him away from England, where Charlotte was determined to reside. Before it had been chiefly on her mother's account that she wished to stop at home; but having put her foot down, and having, moreover, tasted a little of the sweets of popularity, she resolved to stand to her guns, preferring old maidenhood to surrender. His Royal Highness said nothing. He was loftily indifferent, and referred the question to the Queen. She decided that this match would do as well as any other, and that as Charlotte was satisfied, and promised to be good, the *prétendu*, although a pauper, had better be accepted. Such unwonted calm and peace fell upon the Court, that it scarce knew itself in the strange disguise. Had they all tumbled by chance into the Garden of Eden, or what was the meaning of this foretaste of millennium? At news of the match, the mob ceased howling. The two Charlottes, who had been wont to snap and bite, drove about in a glass coach sweetly smiling, embracing now and again in the face of an admiring

populace like gushing, affectionate angels. His Royal Highness, coercing the pain in his toe, skipped gaily about Carlton House, and received his mamma and daughter with greetings of intensest love. People who were ignorant of what had gone before were moved to tears by the contemplation of so heavenly a spectacle as this united happy family. Sure so devoted a group was never seen—one which knew naught of scratchings, or hot water, or the washing of foul linen. As for Leopold, he moved among the throng, a sadly placid Corsair—an amiable Manfred—just the sort of lover to win an emotional maid. All the royal brothers, too, laying aside for the nonce their petty jealousies and hatreds and covert squabbings, joined in the beautiful tableau. Pity there was no great historic painter living then to limn the glorious scene. Jovial York, radiant and jolly, clasping the hand of Kent, of whom he was so very fond; Cumberland hard by, his imprudent match forgotten, embracing his mamma, who would never receive his wife; England's Hope kneeling beside Manfred, on the rich carpet of the great crimson drawing-room at Carlton House, with papa hovering like a stout but graceful fowl, hiccupping from behind his pocket-handkerchief, “Bless you, my dearest children!” I vow 'twould make a touching picture, but as in grand historic pieces a taste of allegory is permissible, I would put in the lion and the lamb, and the tiger

and the kid, lying amicably side by side among the gilded furniture.

So Charlotte married Manfred and was happy; for he was a very good young man, and set himself forthwith to curb her boisterous manners and check the exuberance of her tongue. And under his tutelage she improved daily, for sure never did a girl struggle up to womanhood under less promising auspices. No wonder the people loved her, for under the roughness and tomboyishness was a heart of real gold, and a nature whose sterling worth was shown by the way it surmounted its difficulties. Just think of the travail *in tenebris* of the poor innocent, inexperienced soul! When Manfred appeared, a kind and judicious schoolmaster, she was grateful for his wise coercion, thankful to cling to a strong arm that was to lead her out of darkness; and that she should have been so, proved her unlikeness to her mother and the healthy strength of her character.

The marriage and consequent emancipation of the Princess brought good to others besides herself. She was not rich, but comfortably off as princesses go; and at Claremont, which was bestowed on her as a *pied-à-terre*, the judicious schoolmaster was also a cautious house steward. He supervised the butcher's book and sternly harangued a graceless and felonious greengrocer, and put to unutterable confusion and flight a cook who purloined the dripping. Indeed,

both household and tradespeople pronounced that “furriners was hofful cheeseparing,” and that they ought to be relegated to their original garrets, instead of being permitted to batten upon England. The profusion of Carlton House, with its delightful perquisites and waste, was not imitated at Claremont; therefore her Royal Highness was not without money in her purse, although she was comparatively poor. And one day, upon returning from a ride with the Corsair, she found a pleasant surprise awaiting her. A little lady, with a crisp curly head, and a modest garb of woollen stuff, was sitting in the hall. Her costume was simple and countrified, and other Pharaohs had arisen who knew not Joseph; and, pampered creatures that they were, they would have turned so modest-looking a petitioner away. But Miss Rowe was not one to be routed by a pampered *valetaille*. She observed calmly that the Princess Charlotte was a dear friend of hers—the dearest female friend she had in all the world—and that she would sit in the airy hall and enjoy the summer sweetness until her Royal Highness should come home. There was a determination about the little lady which awed the pampered menials, and, as she was unarmed with weapons of offence, they allowed her to have her way. Charlotte, in due course, came cantering up to the hall door in a Regency hat, like a naval captain’s, bedizened with a gold-lace band, looking very pretty

in her happiness and new sober manner ; but at sight of Miss Rowe, the lessons of the schoolmaster were scattered to the winds, and she flew across the marble floor with hoyden haste and arms extended, and fell plump into the lap of Abigel, having caught her feet in her habit. The Corsair was not angry, for dearest Charlotte's heart must be allowed to speak sometimes, though it was reprehensible to stumble over her skirts. This should be the subject of a lecture on a more fitting occasion. Meanwhile, Charlotte must be permitted to embrace her friend, and hear the latest news.

" My dearest darling girl ! " cried the gleeful Princess, " you've known me as a cage-bird. Now I am free as air ; and I know it can't last, for I'm a poor erring creature, and this is heaven. I'm quite, quite, quite happy, my sweetest Abigel. What do you think of that, Miss ? Don't you think I ought to be afraid ? "

That any one should be quite, quite, quite happy did appear to Abigel a dangerously abnormal condition of things, unsuited to the ways of earth ; but to see any one so was a deliciously new sensation to her, all the more curiously enjoyable in that for her own part she aspired to nothing of the kind. " So my dear princess is happy ? " she said, with a bright smile. " I am so glad, and it lies with me to make her happier still."

"Quick! How is that?" asked Charlotte, who had dragged her friend into her bedroom, and was working herself up to the requisite pitch for an entrancing exchange of confidences and a good hearty cry.

"It lies with me to show how you can be of signal service to a friend, and win the undying gratitude of two persons. Will not that make you the happier?"

"Of course it will. Anything for dearest Abigel. What is there to be done?"

Then Miss Rowe related to the Princess the result of her stay in Yorkshire. It had been a long stay—a weariful agglomeration of fatiguing months—endless and soul-harassing; but it was over now, and Miss Rowe had come south for good.

"How delightful!" cried Charlotte.

But Abigel shook her head. "I belong to another and a humbler sphere than yours. For a brief period of folly I was in a false position, but that is over for ever. It will not be well for your Royal Highness to have so lowly a friend as I. Prince Leopold would object to it, and rightly. I know my place, and shall love you always—from a respectful distance."

"Prince Leopold will like what I like!" blurted out valiant Charlotte. "Besides, after slaving and grubbing for this man, he will, of course, marry you. It will be a nice and poetic termination, and the Countess of Northallerton will remain my honoured friend—my sister!"

Abigel turned deadly pale and trembled. "No, no!" she murmured. "Don't think of such a thing. He would not wish it, nor I! Marry me out of gratitude? Never! I do not love him."

Charlotte looked at her friend and knitted her smooth brow. "That's a fib, my dear," she remarked slowly. "But I understand your pride, which is right and maidenly. If you did not care for the man, why should you have slaved as you have done? I've asked myself that all along. But, at the same time, it mustn't be out of gratitude. I know more than you think. Has he never spoken, or looked as if he wished to speak? Men are so stupid!"

Abigel grew more confused and pained. Why would nobody believe that her conduct was induced by pure philanthropy and love of right? Was it graven on her sleeve that she loved Leoline? Must she bury herself beyond human ken that none should read the secret? It was visible apparently to all the world, patent to every one, except the two persons whom it most concerned. Leoline, up in the clouds, beheld it not; nor Cyrus, her affianced husband. It was a mercy that Cy should suspect nothing. Her husband! The word had a new and dreadful ring, now that for a second time her hidden love was brought home to her—pulled off the altar, where Cupid had so long been grilling in vain. She would be true to Cyrus, as Cyrus was true to her, having given her word. That

her friend should not be led away by false impressions, Abigel, in her native truthfulness, told Charlotte about Cyrus, and the gladsome face of the Princess grew very grave and dark. " You're mad ! " she said ; " quite mad. You've no right to wreck your own existence thus, any more than you have a right to buoy up this honest fellow with false hopes. It is cruel to him, the behaviour of a coquette. You are not one, I know ; but it looks like it. What will your life be ? Just think of it ! In the midst of surroundings, each one of which will sicken you till the acuteness of your sense is blunted. You may bear a distasteful thing once or twice or thrice, but all your life—every day and night and hour ! My dear, just think of it ! Think of having to pray that your nature may be coarsened. You are a sweet child, but only fit for Bedlam ! "

Charlotte assumed the manner of a matron who knew the world. Abigel was provoked. " To you," she said, " has fallen the blessed lot which is given to few women. You are desperately in love with a man, and he with you, and fate has permitted you to have him. How many of the great ladies of this Court have loved wildly and fiercely, and been obliged to marry some one else ? You do not know Cyrus as I have learnt to know him. The truest, the most unselfish, the most singleminded of men. In his humble station he is as good even as Prince Leopold,

if not as handsome. I a coquette indeed." The blood mantled in Abigel's cheek as she renumerated the excellences of her cousin. In sooth he was truly admirable, and she liked him very much; for he treated her with the unconscious chivalry of an ancient knight, who went forth against dragons and griffins as a pastime, and brought back their reeking brimstone tongues to win a gracious nod.

"Can you really be in love with the celebrated Sprig of Myrtle? *Il ne manquerait que ça!*" laughed the wise matron Charlotte, wheeling round. "My dear, I will get you a strait-waistcoat, and shave off those little curls. I always liked your big cousin. In those ghastly days at Warwick House his bluntness amused me, and I admired in him the qualities of an upright, honest, English yeoman, one of those good men who are numerous, thank God, among the British lower class. But to want to marry him! Although he's your blood relation, 'twould be a *mesalliance*. You are a refined and cultured lady. You the wife of a boxer! You do the honours of his public-house to the Corinthians behind the bar! Faugh! *Vraiment, ma chère, tu es impayable, et je t'en fais mes compliments!*"

Here was the same picture which Cribb had drawn for the warning of his boy. Abigel was silent. How could she explain to railing Charlotte that the refined and cultured lady was a cork upon the waters, a

being with no money and no friends except this bruiser ; one who, moreover, from her bringing up had no means of earning a livelihood ! Grandaunt Pentecost was dead, and had left sparse savings, and her niece had no right to place her foot any more within the grounds of Battle Magna ; she was a forlorn and houseless wanderer. It is so easy for those who are cosy in a snug corner of the harbour to scoff at the labouring smacks that buffet with the waves without. She could not say, “ The bar of the public-house and a sopped toast is preferable to the gutter and no food.” It would be to place herself in a false light, for she would rather starve than marry a man merely for bread and butter. A coquette. She really and honestly liked and respected Cyrus, and was satisfied that it was in her power to make him happy if she tried, even if that enviable state was denied to herself ; and it is admissible to suppose that her lonely condition may have helped to brighten the possibility of life with him, though she would have scorned to be guided alone by such a motive. But she could not tell Charlotte this, more especially as the latter would have instantly opened her purse strings, and have insisted on becoming her banker.

She had come for money, but not for her own use. The chain was complete which united Leo and the peerage ; but preliminary expenses were inevitable

before Lord Osmington could be made to disgorge. Of course he could fight tooth and nail, throw difficulties in the way, and harass the foe by every means in his power. If he found them out, he would probably (having no principle) endeavour to bribe the witnesses. It was essential to have the command of a few hundred pounds, which, when he came to his own, Lord Northallerton would gladly refund.

Charlotte acquiesced at once, was enchanted so to do for many reasons, and smiled waggishly the while, being inwardly resolved that the fortunate youth and the candidate for a strait-waiscoat should be indissolubly bound together through her means. With her matronly dignity had come into being the inevitable love of matchmaking. She had known Leoline ever since she was a child, and had promised in the old, old days to do wonderful things for him. He was an excellent creature, and so was Abigel. They were made for one another; and Charlotte promised herself the pleasure of upsetting importunate barriers. What is the use of being a Princess if we cannot on occasion be a *Dea ex machinâ*? He was her absent mother's *protégé* too; and Lord Osmington was a horrid wretch, whom it would be a joy to topple over. She was in the habit of looking on him as one of her father's evil geniuses. What an extra satisfaction, then, to assist in plunging him into outer darkness among the teeth-gnashers!

Abigel was a clever girl, a valiant paladin. Leopold would admire her as much as her old friends, and would give sapient advice, such as might prove of signal use. The Corsair was summoned into conclave without further delay, and, after cautiously considering the various points, gave it as his opinion that Charlotte might assist the budding peer and poet. The chain being complete, common justice demanded that the Earl should have his own, but he strongly deprecated the attitude of his Princess, in that she displayed unchristian vengefulness with regard to the usurper. Volubly she objected that her misery at Warwick House had been partly due to his mischievous counsels, that by him her father's natural urbanity had been changed to gall; whereupon the schoolmaster cried, "Doucement! doucement!" and pointed out that but for the troubles of Warwick House and the numberless scrimmages there, his beloved Charlotte would have become Mrs. Somebody else, and never Madam Leopold. Upon this, as may be supposed, Charlotte fell into his arms and embraced him tenderly, and emerged presently from out his waist-coat with moistened eyes and a red nose. He did not comprehend English laws, explained the schoolmaster. But Miss Rowe was so clear-headed and so resolutely energetic, that she doubtless knew what ought to be done. She did—that is, she had inquired, Abigel responded, blushing; but there was some one somewhere

in the shrubbery who had been to make inquiries, and, turning out preternaturally sharp, had written it all down. Charlotte looked at her demure friend, whose eyes were innocently directed to the carpet, and laughed so loud that the schoolmaster was forced to say "Doucement." "Really she is *impayable*," declared Charlotte, with an apologetic giggle. "Do, dearest Leopold, run out and fetch him. 'Tis *le beau cousin*. I might have known he was here. You'll know him by his fists and shoulders." By-and-by the Prince returned with Mr. Smalley, who looked pink and confused ; but recovering himself, produced a piece of paper, which he had had from Mr. Shepherd, the Attorney-General. It was as simple as A B C, that gentleman had declared, if the chain was solid. Dignities may not be lost through the negligence of any of the persons entitled thereto in not claiming them within a special time. If the case was pronounced clear by the Attorney-General and an emissary from the Herald's College, the Regent would be requested to issue a writ of summons, and the new peer could take his seat at once ; but if there were rival claimants, it might prove less simple, and be referred to a committee of the House of Lords, who might chatter frivolously over it for weeks, and even months.

Abigel smiled contemptuously. Her case was as clear as daylight, and there could not possibly be other claimants ; for was it not satisfactorily proven

that Roger was, if not the only, the *eldest* son of the fugitive, and that Hans was his only son? She wished to make the pedigree correct and shipshape, and therefore she intended to take note of Miles and Dorcas, the other children of James Christopher, for 'twas hard they should be out in the cold, even though dead. The documents were safe, labelled methodically; and the precious monument was in a box at Stratton, ready to move to town with all the cloud of witnesses. The case was complete—without a flaw.

"I would not complicate the matter with unnecessary witnesses," objected the pragmatical Corsair; to which the maiden responded that peerage cases differ from others, in that hearsay evidence is admitted, and even courted, for 'twould be impossible to establish descents according to the strict rules whereby contracts are established and property regulated. The evidence of any living witness of what passed within the short time of his own memory would often be insufficient, and there is no other way of knowing the evidence of deceased persons than by the relation of others, of what they may have been heard to say. So saith the law, as expounded by the ingenious Mr. Cruise. Hence, in order to crush and relegate my lord Osmington to his place among the teeth-gnashers, Miss Rowe had marshalled a phalanx of hags and aged men who each had anecdotes to relate

which would fit into the roll of history, and she was ready to produce the cohort at fitting time and season.

The simplicity of the whole thing was delightful ; and Charlotte, as she clapped her hands, vowed that she would journey to Battle Magna to see the new earl make his triumphant entry. Why, if Abigel was quick about it, the matter might be settled before winter. Charlotte would have a new gown for the occasion—pale blue and silver. Yes, that would be the most becoming. Perhaps it had better be ordered at once ; which ravishing proposition was met by another “*Doucement*,” and a cold-blooded suggestion that chickens ought not to be counted before they are hatched. Charlotte bowed her fair head and blushed, for she knew something that was not yet announced to a delighted nation, and admitted that the schoolmaster was right as usual. But before allowing the cousins to depart, she exacted a promise that they would keep her *au courant* of all that passed, and that they would inform Leoline that a warm welcome awaited him at Claremont.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHECK.

THE warning of the sage of Claremont anent chickens was wise, for it was soon evident that the charming costume of blue and silver would not be required for some months to come. When the insolence of certain snakes which he had warmed in his bosom became completely known to my lord Osmington, he flew in a fury, which ended in abject tears. It was just like the baseness of the world to take advantage of a poor nobleman's enfeebled health, to undermine the comfort of his latter days. He had treated this vermin with kindness, and, lo, the ill-conditioned scum bit his generous hand. That Pentecost should have died was some consolation, but she might have had the grace to do so several years earlier, whereby the machinations of the scum would have been nipped in the bud. It was horrid to know that they were poking their noses about where they had no business, although my lord was pretty sure that their researches would prove fruitless. My lord, as we know, had

been assured ever so many times by Pentecost that she and his father had made things comfortable ; it was not unamusing, therefore, to a mischievous nature, to allow the girl to ferret among the chairs and tables, convinced that she would reap nothing but cobwebs for her labour. My lord troubled himself little with what she might be doing, but he was seriously annoyed by the conduct of Madam Smalley's grandson. That insolent bruiser had dared to trounce Caleb Rann after he, the President of the Pugilistic Club, had formally announced that he was incapable of doing so. He had, moreover, returned afterwards to Yorkshire, from whence my lord had lured him by ingenious means. As he drove back to town from Kingston on the afternoon of the eventful day, my lord breathed fire and sulphur, and gave vent to such strings of curses as even to surprise his groom. There was nothing that he would not do to ruin those two men. Cyrus should be pressed and sent aboard ship away to the Spanish Main. He had threatened to see to it long ago. Caleb should be hunted down, prevented from making professional engagements—utterly undone. They both should rue the day when they presumed to flout their master. But as the hours waned, my lord's resentment cooled. He had to put up with many a jest anent his losses and prophecies, and listen to the praises of Cyrus sung in duet by his Grace of Beaufort and Lord Worcester.

"Hang it!" his Grace cried, as he showed his fine person in White's window, "the fellow is cutting his own throat; with such skill, such rapid improvement, he might do anything. What does he mean by retiring at his age, when I offered to be his friend?"

"We'll keep our eye on him, at all events," chimed in Lord Worcester; "for no doubt he'll change his mind."

Lord Sefton cried "Hear, hear!"

And so Lord Osmington, in a calmer moment, judged that, watched by such powerful protectors, it would be imprudent to attempt the pressing. But as his venom must ooze out somewhere, lest repression should cause him to explode, my lord looked round for a scapegoat whereon to wreak his spite, and pitched upon the unhappy Caleb. He never heard of the interview after the battle, and the precious piece of intelligence communicated by Rann to Cyrus, or his vengeance would have been more unrelenting even than it was. He only knew that Caleb had disappointed his hopes, and behaved like a dolt and an idiot, and caused my lord himself to appear in an unenviable light. He accordingly sent for Mendoza, and bade him, on pain of his eternal displeasure and enmity, to drop Rann, a proceeding to which the Jewish hero was nothing loth, since his candidate for fistic honours, disappointing and unruly at all times, had proved a grievous failure, and covered his friends

with opprobrium. So the miserable Rann when he rose up from his bed—recovered from wounds and bruises—found himself utterly forlorn, and having, by reason of his ruffianly and rowdy manners, made few allies, knew not which way to turn. He hung about the Fives-courts and got the cold shoulder there, sought at Limmer's for ancient topers who had been, in more halcyon days, only too glad to imbibe prime port at his expense, but who avoided so unpopular a character when he had no money in his purse. He grew angry and desperate, and was haled before the beak at Bow Street by robin redbreasts for misdemeanours and street-brawling, and drifted soon within the purlieus of the Fleet, dirty and out at elbows. Cyrus, he knew, was gone to the far North, out of reach, or he would have turned to him in his trouble. He scrawled a line to Mr. Cribb, begging for his address; but the latter disapproved of the Pink, and declined the required information. He even humbled himself before his patron, entreating mercy and assistance; but my lord curtly reminded the petitioner that he owed him thirty pounds, and ought to be ashamed of his impudence. So the once splendid Pink of Bow dropped into the poorer side of the debtors' prison, and seemed like to lie shivering there for life.

My lord was justified in complaining of enfeebled health. If the gay youth of his Royal Master had weighted his middle age with gout and other disagree-

ables, the increasing years of my lord Osmington were fraught with a multitude of drawbacks. Until revived with cordials and cunning recipes, he lay like a corpse of a morning, under the hands of valet and barber. His memory grew weak and fitful ; his prematurely wrinkled brow throbbed with constant headache ; his hands fluttered so that he had much ado to raise a glass to his lips. Under these circumstances his temper did not improve, and the temporary denizens of the Ark vowed that to live with such a bear necessitated a flow of presents. He grew so broken and despondent that one of the houris, plunging into his chamber, thought that he was dying ; whereupon she commenced to remove his best Dresden china, and to lay hands on his rings and snuff-boxes. This acted as a pleasant astringent to the invalid, for my lord was a thorough cynic. From under his laced nightcap he gazed with a wicked grin, and suddenly rising like a ghost and tugging at the bell, ordered the hussy to be seized and dragged before the magistrate. Little *contres* of this description were exhilarating to one of his style of humour ; but a cabal for his utter ruin was quite another affair. Like Richard before Bosworth, he groaned and kicked ; but goaded by the gravity of the situation, he donned his helmet and breast-plate. What had the wretches found ?—what had they discovered ? Had Madam Smalley made confession on her deathbed ? It was

all important to know that. By his instructions Mr. Secretary wrote to the Yorkshire agent for details on the subject. Did the lamented housekeeper send for the parson? and did her attentive niece close her old eyes? Were the tenants still making donkeys of themselves? What was happening at Battle Magna? The agent's reply was consoling. The West Riding dragged on its monotonous existence, each township duller than its neighbour. Madam Smalley was taken with a fit, was speechless when the doctor came, and dead before the arrival of her relatives, who chanced at the time to be away. This was vastly comforting. Clearly Pentecost had carried her secret to the grave. The aggressive attitude on the part of young Jarvis and his adherents must be mere bravado, to induce my lord, if possible, to uncover the chinks in his armour. They really knew nothing, but pretended that they did, in hopes of making him commit himself. It was fortunate that, though perhaps unduly careless on the whole, my lord had taken certain precautions in case of these silly people continuing to pry. Since they threw down the gauntlet, he would take it up, and plunge them into a labyrinth of difficulties.

When Leo and his allies called, after a brief delay, on the Attorney-General at his chambers in Sergeant's Inn, and begged him to name an early day for the hearing of their case, they were filled with consterna-

tion. Sir Samuel Shepherd announced, as he mended a pen, that complications had arisen. The newspapers having stated that the Earldom of Northallerton (supposed to be extinct) was about to be claimed under romantic circumstances, other claimants had suddenly come forward, who had entered a caveat through their solicitor, praying that time might be allowed them to substantiate their claim.

"Other claimants!" cried Abigel, pale and bewildered. "What possible other claimants? Sure never was a case so simple or so clear! If Mr. Attorney-General would only cast his experienced eye——"

"Quite so, quite so!" replied Sir Samuel, waving his pen. The lady need not look so shocked. It was a curious fact, that in most peerage cases the advent of one claimant gave rise to a crop of others. It seemed as if every one who chanced to bear the same name was all at once convinced that he had only to come forward to be received with acclamation, whereas, in nine cases out of ten, his pretensions turned out the merest soap-bubble, which vanished at a breath.

"But what possible claimants?" persisted Miss Rowe. "Did any one pretend to be Roger or Hans?" It was true, that she could not produce the certificate of death of either of those parties, though one of the witnesses could swear she had laid out Roger, and could point to his last resting-place. As to Hans, it

would be difficult, impossible, indeed; for he had fallen at Vinegar Hill in '98, and in that *débâcle* many had been put down as missing whose bodies had not been identified. "Leo!" she cried, with the decision of a commander-in-chief; "you must seek among the records of your father's regiment. Pray Heaven, he was inscribed as dead!"

Sir Samuel was mightily amused by the little general and her domineering ways, and the meek submissiveness wherewith her aides-de-camp obeyed orders. Leo and Cy took up their hats, and prepared to run off instanter, but were checked in mid-career by another wave of the pen.

"There was no reason," declared Sir Samuel, "why the pretensions of the others should be kept secret." The person who prayed that he might be called forthwith to the Upper House was a tailor in Houndsditch, whose brother was a fishmonger. They declared themselves the legitimate grandchildren of James Jarvis, who, in consequence of trouble connected with a duel, enlisted in a marching regiment, fought against the Scotch at Derby in 1745, and, escaping with his life (contrary to what had been reported), retired to obscurity in London, where he married, and in due course died. The prayer further recited that the said James Jarvis was buried in a certain city churchyard, a fact attested by a tomb-stone, which all who ran might read.

This was terrible. Archibald, last lord, had certainly given out (as it was conjectured to stay pursuit) that his brother had died at Derby, but, when he could no longer be tried for murder, recanting after his demise, had spoken the truth and put up the monument in Stratton church. He had contradicted himself; but the motive was apparent. Which of his statements was the correct one? Did the fugitive, after the duel, fly to Ireland? or did he fight at Derby? or did he do neither? The tailor promised to show that he fought at Derby; that brother Archibald, deeming him a disgrace to the family, was glad to suppose him dead; but that, his lack of interest seeming heartless, he had put up a monument to clear his character.

Perceiving Miss Rowe's perturbation, the Attorney-General hinted gently that she need not be down-hearted yet. The claimants would have to show that their James Jarvis was the real Simon Pure. There might be a dozen James Jarvis's, and only one James Christopher; and unless it were clearly proven that Archibald had put up his tablet malice prepense, the probabilities were in favour of the inscription on the Stratton stone being the correct one.

"Oh, Cy!" Abigel wailed; "if we only had that letter which you surrendered to my lord!" Whereupon Mr. Smalley looked depressed and sheepish; for these people, even though they ultimately failed

to make good their claim, might give rise to a peck of worries and disastrous delays by manufacturing the bogey of another fugitive.

"I shall give them a month," declared Mr. Attorney-General, "and then we'll see about it. If their tale is as plausible as yours, the question must be referred to a Committee of Privileges."

With this the trio, just now so jubilant, were forced to be content; and Leo went down to pay his respects to the Princess by no means in gladsome mood. A Committee of Privileges! That might mean endless annoyance and tantalization; and Charlotte, as she looked at his rueful visage, felt sorry for her friend Abigel, and deferred what she had promised herself to say to the would-be noble Earl.

In the midst of those hopes and fears, Lord Osmington regained his spirits. Like a superannuated warhorse, he swished his decrepit tail at the sound of the clarion. It was as though the weariness of soul which he was inflicting on others was fresh life blood to him. He rode in the park clad in a prodigious surtout, which would have caused poor Brummel to shriek aloud, if that desolate wreck had not been engrossed by this time by his own troubles in his Calais garret; and when asked where he had picked up so terrifying a garment, replied jocundly that it was built by a Houndsditch fellow who aspired to the peerage. "Dash, dash!" he roared; "the

creature is worth cultivating, if only for his astounding impudence. Think of an Earl wielding the goose and stitching cross-legged on a counter. What a garment? Indeed 'twas villainously cut, but interesting as a curiosity." And by twisting the affair into a ridiculous shape, the rival claimants became a standing joke, and blueblooded dandies asked one another what they should do when the coalheaver took the oaths. "Was it a coalheaver, or a scavenger?" inquired a languid beau. "Gad! But he'll have his mansion in Grosvenor Square, with glasses of blue ruin on the table, and Suke will bid us to her routs." Like the wrestler who, when he touched Mother Earth, arose refreshed, so did the enfeebled Vere grow strong under his growing perplexities. His rattle was quite amusing, and the Grand Signor declared to his monitress that the old *régime* was twice as racy as the new one. When he came and gasped like a fish out of water in his Royal Master's favourite chair, and sat for hours without speaking, Vere was, no doubt, a nuisance; but when he arrived in the extraordinary clothes manufactured by the Earl *in petto*, and begged the Grand Signor to patronize the snip who could trace back to the Plantagenets, his Royal Highness laughed; and a laugh, when you are painfully aware that you are getting old and have pangs in your big toe, is a precious thing not to be neglected.

"It is curious," he remarked one day, "that you should have disliked that young fellow from the first. Of course I don't like him, for reasons which you can guess. You wanted him banished to the Indies, I remember, only my brother York would not give you a commission for him. Was it instinct, or second sight?"

"Perhaps I knew him to be the real man, and wanted him out of the way?" gibed my lord; at which the Regent frowned, for to suggest that one of his own chosen friends could be capable of such baseness was to make reflections on himself; and vague suspicions which he had once entertained had begun to crop up again. His Royal Highness concluded, after deliberation, that Lord Osmington, if whimsical and racy by fits and starts, was very bad form, and agreed that his monitress was right in advising that he should be cut.

Among other festive and amusing pranks, my lord, much as he objected to lawyers, bearded Sir Samuel Shepherd in his den, and facetiously asked him what he would take to quash the impending investigation. "Lawyers," he explained, "have such proverbially short memories, that they cannot remember anything without refreshers. If fees, constantly renewed, produce such amazing effects on memory, why should not the dose, judiciously applied, be productive of the opposite results? Legal minds being constituted

differently from those of other men, it might be for the good of science to try the experiment. Nobody but a lawyer would dream of accepting a refresher. Others would be ashamed to be paid twice over for one job. What did Sir Samuel think ? ” Sir Samuel failed to perceive the point of his lordship’s joke, but had no doubt it was monstrous droll. He, Sir Samuel, could tolerate a jest, even if it were a poor one ; but it was well that those whom it concerned should know that he would do his duty, and was above bribes ; whereat my lord showed naive surprise, protesting that he meant nothing. Before he took his leave, however, he scrutinized the maps upon the walls, and hummed snatches of gay airs, and sucked the crutch of his walking stick, and hung about as if there was something within which declined to rise to the surface. At last, just as he stood on the threshold, he turned half round and said over his shoulder, “ You’ve got to do with swindlers, Sir Samuel, though I say it. I know ‘em of old ; for they owe all to me, and were thankless. As an Englishman, and entrenched within my rights, I ask for a fair field and no favour for myself. Only beware of swindlers, that’s all. I’ll bet you now—but I suppose you don’t bet—that half their documents and things are forgeries, and clumsy forgeries, too. Will you promise me this, and it ain’t much—dash, dash, if it is—to let me know at once if you find they have forged their papers ? ”

That was fair ; and the Attorney-General promised, proceeding further to explain that in cases like the present a minute and jealous look-out was kept for the detection of forgeries. Not a paper-certificate and so forth but was placed under the microscope and scrupulously examined before it was passed as genuine. At this my lord seemed satisfied, and, humming, strode away.

Sir Samuel sat pondering in his armchair, and nibbled the end of his pen to quicken the action of his mind. It was a queer business altogether. There was this lord whom people wanted to oust. He was a singular specimen of aristocratic breeding, with his aspen hands and sunken cheeks, glazed eyes and bitter reckless tongue. Was it in jest or earnest that he spoke of quashing the affair ? Pshaw. Even a dare-devil such as he would think thrice before so insulting the Attorney-General. The tailor and the fishmonger from Houndsditch, what of them ? They might be the true heirs, but dignities would sit oddly on such common vulgar wretches. That other fellow now, with his clear-cut features and blue eyes—the ermine would become him well. The enthusiastic young woman, too, was interesting. 'Twas a pleasure to watch her face like a landscape flecked by clouds—now darkening now bursting into sunshine. Staid lawyer though he was, Sir Samuel caught himself hoping that the young man might

win the day, if only for the satisfaction of witnessing the delight that would glow on that maiden's face. And then he laughed softly to think that at his age, buried to the eyes in mildewed lore, he should be so romantic. Where was the batch of documents which had been consigned to his care by Mr. Leoline Jarvis, and the pedigree ? What did Lord Osmington imply by his warning ? Swindlers ! Surely not ; and yet his lordship distinctly stated that he knew them to be dishonest. He would just take a glance at the budget, and see what the papers were. Unlocking a safe, the Attorney-General drew forth the packet which Leoline had left, and opened it. A rubbing from a stone, some letters and certificates ; the latter pencilled on the margin to the effect that witnesses would be forthcoming to prove from whence they came. A diary—that was of no use. A letter from James Jarvis, enumerating his children and stating that he had settled in England. That might be important. But how was this ? The paper was right enough, but the writing on it—— Sir Samuel looked serious, and adjusted his *loupe*. This was a fictitious letter, written by a modern hand on a piece of ancient paper. No doubt of it. Something crooked was going on. Nothing could be clearer to an experienced eye than that this document was a forgery. The very first he had examined ! If one, why not others ? Ah me, how we may be deceived by ap-

parently ingenuous enthusiasm! It is a serious matter when claimants attempt to strengthen their position by means of fictitious authorities. Possibly Lord Osmington really did know the class of people with whom he had to deal and suspected their tactics. Sir Samuel had promised to inform him if he came upon anything suspicious. He had not been long about it, for a first cursory glance at the documents had been sufficient to convince his experience that all was not above board. A promise is a promise, and must needs be fulfilled. With a tinge of indignation in that these young parties should have so impudently attempted to hoodwink him with patent falsehoods, Sir Samuel penned a note, stating what had come under his notice, and despatched it to Osmington House.

Who so jubilant as Vere, when he received the precious missive? He went about, showing it to all his friends, and craving their advice as to how he ought to treat the abominable impostors. The Attorney-General, miracle of uprightness and acumen, had cast his eagle eye upon their flimsy efforts and detected a flaw at a glance. This written opinion was enough to go upon. Should he take the bull by the horns? One set of sham candidates, his friends would be pleased to observe, might be crushed at a blow; the others, if given time, would surely betray their weakness. It was a conspiracy. Unless

something was done, the subject would be referred to a Committee of Privileges in the House of Lords, and that would mean expense and trouble in answering foolish charges. Would not his friends advise him to pursue and crush the forger? Detected at the outset, he would confess and cry *peccavi*. Prompt measures—swift vengeance—might frighten the other parties, and then there would be an end of the matter. If a young gentleman who had been privileged to enter the household of a Princess of Wales was snapped up at once and consigned to durance vile, surely a Houndsditch tailor would pause and think twice before unfolding his empty claim? The Princess Charlotte had been deluded enough to give her countenance to the peccant youth who had been her mother's page. That was sad, and it was a matter of wonder that the wise Prince, her husband, had allowed her to be so rash. All things considered, he would drive to Brighton, lay the matter before his Royal Master, and be guided by his opinion. That was a crafty stroke of Vere's, who guessed that the Regent was a little suspicious of his conduct; for the Regent's jealousy of his daughter's independent ways was only smouldering, and the fact that she should openly countenance a follower of the Dreadful Woman's looked as if she were preparing to take up her absent mother's cudgels. When my lord Osmington told his tale and artfully laying

stress on Charlotte's interest meekly craved advice, his Royal Highness was furious. Could not the minx be content with her mawkish happiness? Was the delicious calm which reigned in the Pavilion to be broken by her meddling? It was most improper of a Royal Princess to espouse the cause of an adventurer, the more so when she knew how the act would vex papa. He sent an angry message to his daughter, and another to her schoolmaster, and advised my lord Osmington that if the fellow had forged papers he would certainly prosecute him.

The moment chosen by Vere to show himself upon the Steine was a fortunate one, if he desired to find his master in ill-humour. His Royal Highness had not recovered from a shock which he had received a short while previously, and which had hit him very hard. My lady Hertford, in her character of Maintenon, had from time to time been eloquent on the subject of his early male attachments, exhorting him to affect an *entourage* suited to his years. George was sadly conscious that it is the destiny of some great ones to fall into a bad groove, and be surrounded by persons whom the better class refuse to know. It has often occurred that highly cultivated men have shunned a Court, not from dislike of one august personage, but by reason of the boon companions on which it has pleased him to shine. Coaxed by the Hertfords, his Royal Highness en-

deavoured to gather round him the noblest who were available in the circle of art and letters. To gratify Sir Walter Scott he got up little dinners, and the great novelist vowed that a pleasanter host he had never met—one who was so courteous and so genial, so well able to hold his own in quip and crank and repartee. Of pictorial and plastic art, there were just then few worthy professors. The horrible daubs of a Fuseli or a Hamilton, the feeble inanities of a West, thrill with terror a more cultured generation; but such masters as existed were patronized by the Prince of Wales; and the public saw with pleasure that the latter days of Carlton House were more decorous than the first.

This was well. But George clung to his youth, and could not divest himself of a lurking fondness for those who reminded him of boyhood. Which of us but loves to recall the scapegrace times, when we were merry and light-hearted, heedless of consequences, with no thoughts of digestion or of a liver—when *atra cura* was not constantly sitting on our shoulders, whispering that all is vanity, and that this life, if a farce to some, is to a large majority extremely disagreeable? We took pinchbeck for gold then, without asking questions about the why and the wherefore; never troubling ourselves to inquire why some, who are no worse than their neighbours, are so consistently out of luck; why the deserving perish of starvation, while the unscrupulous loll in chariots.

We were desperately reckless in those young days—risked our lives for a five shilling bet, grieved our mammas and papas with nonchalance, and were disgracefully jolly and happy. Tom, our pet comrade, was an awful rake—did things at the remembrance of which in the decorum of a later time we blush; but we love to summon visions of Tom, and look tenderly on his escapades for all that; for with him in the jocund past we spent hours of such unalloyed jollity as are denied to our square-toed present.

So it was with the Prince of Wales. When my lady Hertford droned about the proprieties he acquiesced, but his mind wandered to Fox and the nights of gambling; and when she adjured him to drink less curaçoa, he dreamed of Sheridan and his partiality for brandy. Poor Brinsley was often in his master's thoughts; and since that day at the Fives-courts, when, with reeking breath, filthy linen, and bloodshot eyes, he had plucked the royal sleeve and begged a few pounds, it had become the duty of Secretary Macmahon to see him from time to time. There was little, however, that could be done for Brinsley now.

Since then, when George supposed himself at lowest ebb, Sheridan had sunk even deeper still. 'Twas a pity he had refused the generous offer of a seat in Parliament. Too old to adapt himself to neglect and solitude; tormented by constant clamour from which

there was no escape; pursued by the unrelaxing severity of the harpies of the law; the great dramatist and orator broke down. His mind began to wander. In every approaching man he saw a bailiff—there were enough about without conjuring visions; in every scrap of paper a writ. The nightmare of his existence became so dreadful, that death, however lingering and fraught with pain, would be welcomed as release. On week-days he lurked with shutters closed within his darkened house in Saville Row, creeping out o' Sundays to sit in a bar-parlour; rolling thence to lie in the kennel till devoted servants fetched and carried him home to bed. Living almost entirely on strong waters, the complication of his numerous disorders multiplied rapidly, and he lost the power of movement. Miseries thickened; nor could the last corner where he laid him down to die afford a safe asylum from the baying pack of hounds. Writs and executions poured in, and bailiffs at last gained access to his bed-chamber. One was for dragging him away at once, as he was, in his blankets, to a spunging-house; and he would have been bundled off but for the energetic interference of a Doctor Bain, who warned the too-zealous myrmidon that if the master spirit abandoned its outraged tenement on the road, the said officer would be charged with murder. At this juncture, news of Sherry's plight reached two of the old friends who, though they had not seen his

face for a year or so, yet remembered that he lived. Lord Holland and Mr. Rogers instantly took steps to free him from immediate embarrassment. They sent to tell the Prince of Wales, who replied, through Mr. Secretary, that two hundred pounds was at their service, but that his old friend's difficulties were omnivorous. And here the second wife stepped in, a Miss Ogle, with whom Brinsley never could get on. In sooth she must have had her share to endure, for he was for ever prating of "his first," who held his heart to the end, just as his old love held George's. But the second, *née* Ogle, returned the two hundred pounds, stating that "there was a sufficiency of means to provide all that was necessary for her husband's comfort."

Richard Brinsley Sheridan was beyond human succour. A dose of prussic acid, costing sixpence, would have been more welcome than pros and cons and squabbles with the second, *née* Ogle. The genius whom the unavailing tribute might have relieved was losing consciousness of all but pain. Under what unexpected shapes may Christ's Mercy lurk ! Would you ask help from a tax-collector, crave leniency from a bailiff ? No ; and yet the miracle was worked. Tom Hurst, of Cursitor Street—let us immortalize his name—in all the devil's-dance showed pity. Indeed, he knew Sherry well. He had tapped the genius on the shoulder times enough to wear a hole

in his coat. But the rough fellow had a heart, and saw his way to playing the Samaritan, and at the same time doing his duty. For old acquaintance' sake, to give the stag at bay a chance of dying in peace, though the hounds roared around in chorus, Tom Hurst took possession of the moribund. First in the field, the body was his. So long as he held it, no other execution could take effect; so he established himself at the bedhead of the man who used to flee, but who now clove to him.

Think of that house in Saville Row which had beheld such gatherings, such galaxies of intellectual glitter, overrun now by bailiffs, one nook alone respected through the sturdy protection of a merciful sheriff's officer ! I vow it makes me shudder. A sale with carpets out of window, a dispersion of *penates* while hearts are breaking, is nothing to it ! Flippantly I spoke early in these volumes of broken hearts, denying with a cynicism worthy of Lord Osmington that hearts could break. Fool ! fool ! A moment comes in the lives of—let us hope—a minority, when they look upon their years and wish they could double them. I am forty, say, and people insult me with my middle age. Forty ? would I were eighty, for by the established rule I should then have been dead ten years—have progressed onward on my chequered career towards perfection, another painful step. If this state of feeling—more common than could be wished—is

not akin to the one which we associate with a broken heart—— But hush ! Sherry lies dying.

Sheridan, roused by an altercation outside the door, awoke. A smile spread over his face, which shone with the aureate glimmer from another world.

“ You—Tom Hurst—you ! ” he said faintly. “ Some drink, please—quick ! You ! Doing here what ? Glad it’s you, for you know me well—very well, and can trust me to go quietly—so quietly ! ”

“ Can’t get you any drink, sir,” replied Tom Hurst, “ for if I left my post, others might—— Sir, your wife has called. What shall I say ? ”

“ Wife ? No wife—dead—died so long ago, so long ago ; but we shall soon meet now,” whispered the dying man.

“ Allays thinking of his first ! ” muttered the kind custodian. “ The Bishop o’ Lunnon’s come, sir, to read prayers. You’d like that ? ”

But Sheridan was tossing on his mattress with glittering eyes and thoughts away from the sordid present.

“ It burns, and so do I ! ” he murmured, twisting feverishly. “ It burns, and all I have goes with it ! There goes Apollo ! What fireworks ! They’ll travesty ‘em at Vauxhall ! Take me, Hurst, for I sha’n’t be able to pay—ruined now utterly. Call a coach ! Not too seedy a one, for I’ll go—ready to go with you, Tom, so quietly.”

"Poor soul!" blubbered the sheriff's officer, fairly overcome. "You're goin', sure enough, but not where I can go with you—just at present. Let the Bishop come in and do his palaver, for form's sake—Mr. Sheridan's wandering. As for you, you vultures, you may hover as you like!" he cried roughly to the crowd upon the landing. "I'm as strong as any of you; and till the poor fellow's soul's gone, I don't budge—that's flat!"

And, true to his word, the kind-hearted fellow sat on in the sick chamber with arms crossed doggedly and chin sunk on breast, all through the night and following day, with shaggy-grizzled penthouse set into a scowl, and lines about his mouth which showed that he was firm. Protected thus, the flitting soul battled with bruised wings against the wires—now fiercely fluttering—now sinking down at the cage-bottom exhausted, out of breath. In the middle of the second night, just as the first chill of dawn was crawling through a shutter-chink, the patient moved and murmured—

"No; no more plays from me, Kemble. I'm dried up—done. A drop of brandy, for the Lord's sake!"

And so, in the arms of his strange but fitting nurse, he sank, protected from other sharks, and appropriately gave up the ghost. Even then he was not free. People who had shunned the man hastened to offer homage to the genius when the sinner was clay. It

was decreed that he should lie in state, and be accorded a public funeral in the historic abbey of Westminster. In the forenoon of the day fixed for the interment, a gentleman dressed in sables entered the house, and begged with a show of grief for a last look at his departed friend. The earnestness of the stranger softened the hearts of the watchers. The lid of the coffin was removed, the still face revealed to view. The gentleman gazed for a few moments, and fumbling in his pocket produced a wand of office, with which he touched the forehead of the corpse, and declared to the horror of lookers-on that it was arrested in the King's name for a debt of £500. The funeral group had assembled below; among the pall-bearers were Ministers of State and Peers and Royal Dukes. What was to be done? Mr. Canning consulted with Lord Sidmouth, and to limit the unseemly scandal, they each gave a cheque for £250, and the sad *cortége*, with its gorgeous panoply, went upon its way. How characteristic was the end of Brinsley Sheridan! Splendour and squalid misery marching cheek by jowl down to the last instant, when the slab closed over him. A great man, too simple to profit by his greatness, in whom genius was unaccompanied by judgment. Byron said of him, that all he did was of the best. From his brain emanated the best comedy—*The School for Scandal*; the best burlesque—*The Critic*; the best address—*The Monologue on Garrick*; and the

best parliamentary oration—*The Begum Speech*. In society he shone superb until he grew maudlin drunk. He was so genial that he could soften even an attorney. In spite of endless lessons, he never lost his confidence in the goodness of men. Though his works showed a knowledge of human nature, it was confined to his pen alone, for in all his acts he was the dupe of the designing knave. At the age of sixty-five he died, and the debts which had crushed him amounted, as it turned out, to no more than four thousand pounds in trivial sums. Like his comrade of younger days—the august Signor—he was a muddler. George, when he heard of his end, was more moved than he chose to show, and locked himself up in his apartments for a week, refusing to be comforted.

CHAPTER IX.

A FORLORN HOPE.

THE strategic manœuvres of Lord Osmington plunged the camp of the enemy into confusion. The soaring poet, who wished to rival Byron in his sunward flight, was brought to earth by an unpleasant shot. Seated one morning in a flowing dressing-gown, and planning out an ode over a dish of chocolate, he found himself arrested, accused of having deposited forgeries with Mr. Attorney-General, of being at least accessory to the forging of sundry documents for his own behoof and advantage, knowing them to be forged.

He protested innocence, but forbore to say what he might have said, namely, that the papers were collected by somebody else, and that he knew little of them.

Think of the violent emotions of Abigel ! The tearing of crisp curls ! Think of the anguish of Cyrus over so harrowing a spectacle ! The eyes of the pugilist, usually so calm, flashed fire. My lord, like a wicked mole, was burrowing underground, but when

he displayed his nose above the surface it would be the worse for him. Cyrus could tell a tale or two about my lord, and would show him up as sure as eggs were eggs ; but at the same time he wished that Leo and his peerage were in heaven, a pair of troublesome nuisances, for racking this tender bosom with sorrow, wetting those sweet cheeks with saline rivulets. Leoline never spoke a word of reproach to Abigel, which served to increase her woe, though it was plain that he thought his hot impulsive little paladin might have been tempted in blind eagerness to manipulate or adorn a page. Whatever she had done was for his sake, and loyalty bade him shield the rashness of the too sanguine maiden. It was some time before she could get access to him in his prison, for the Cerberus muttered something about “safe bind, safe find,” and suggested that ladies who hung about such asylums as that over which he ruled might with advantage be invited in to beat a little hemp. She besieged the door of the Attorney-General, who fain would have shut her out, the naughty forging hussy ; but she lay in wait, and clung to him, and her grief was so poignant and sincere that his heart was touched, and he condescended to listen to her pleadings. There was no shadow of doubt, he said, that one at least of the documents was a forgery, and having assured himself of that, he did not trouble himself about the rest. “ Which of the documents was it ? ” the young

lady inquired ; and being told, she remained speechless for a while. That letter forged ! How blind not to have suspected ; for that letter was the cause of uneasiness owing to discrepancies. Some enemy must have placed it in the lapis-lazuli cabinet as a snare. It was never referred to in the diary, which should have led to suspicion. Now she remembered that Lord Osmington, when he warned her last time at Battle Magna to mind her own business, had used the apartment wherein the cabinet stood ; and she recalled also her surprise at finding open that which she was certain some time previously was locked. What audacious crammers were these of hers ! Sir Samuel Shepherd shook her coldly off. Such explanations were bungling and stupid, and a young woman of decent education ought to be ashamed of herself for trying to conceal her own misdemeanours by accusing others. Was he to believe that Lord Osmington forged the letter and laid it in her way ? Disgraceful and unseemly—most uncalled-for suggestion. Sir Samuel must entreat the young woman not to force herself into his presence, or make a hubbub on his staircase. Repulsed, despairing, Miss Rowe opportunely bethought herself that, after all, that particular letter might be discarded without weakening the case. The only important thing it showed was that the family had removed from Ireland to England, a fact which would be sufficiently established by showing that Roger

dwell at Crows' Liberties. That he and the Roger of the monument were one was proven by the box emblazoned with his arms, and by the seal which, through his father Hans, had come down to Leoline. It was quite immaterial to the case that Roger should or should not have had a brother and sisters. Would Sir Samuel, then, put this hateful letter aside, and consider the remainder as though it did not exist ? The Attorney-General was icily polite, and endeavoured to escape. To have found a forgery at all among the submitted documents prejudiced the case immensely in his eyes. He could not conceal that from the young lady. Perhaps it would be best to wait and see what happened to the imprisoned candidate for the coronet ; meanwhile he had the honour to say good afternoon, and beg the young lady clearly to understand that he could not allow her to make his life a burthen by pestering him with trumped-up fables.

The Attorney-General, who began by being kind, had hardened into a flinty and frigid personage. No sympathy or word of help was to be expected from that quarter.

Leoline listened to her story, and believed it ; but shook his head no less despondingly. " My dear," he remarked, " it does not do for minnows to fight with mammoths. My mammy's dying words were true and wise. ' Before God you are the Earl ;

before man you'll never be ! ' Our foe is crafty and rich, and has got us in a trap. How to get out of it, I know not ; for though his ways are dissolute, his social weight as a fine gentleman will stand him in good stead with the great ones. We were ready to use the paper. Who forged it, and how it got into our possession there is nothing to show. Having me here, he will work me some injury for my presumption. I feel a presentiment of that, for are we not friendless ; earthen pipkins, drifting on the stream ? We have floated so far, but soon we shall be broken."

" We are not friendless," cried Miss Rowe, in indignation at such pusillanimous submission. " The Princess Charlotte will not desert us. I ought to have gone to her ere this."

Hot and wrathful Miss Rowe engaged a hackney coach and rumbled down to Claremont. Was the poet's resignation fine, or the reverse ? She could not make up her mind as to this, for if we cannot claw when others claw us, we are not fit to hold our own on this sublunary sphere ; and valiant Miss Rowe was herself one of the clawers. But that he should take the direful results of a mistake upon himself without a murmur, rather than that she should even be scolded, was fine, distinctly sublime ; and the tears rose in the girl's eyes as, lying back in the coach, she contemplated the situation. No doubt the iron pot was crafty, and would smash the pipkins if he could.

What could he do? There was no telling what he might not do rather than be reduced to poverty—what diabolical stratagems he might employ. But she would lift up her voice and cry out, that if anybody was to blame, it was herself; that Leoline kept his lips closed out of chivalry; that if anybody was to be locked up, it was Miss Rowe, and not Mr. Jarvis. Would people believe her tale? The stony politeness of Sir Samuel Shepherd spoke for itself. Others would behave as he had done—withdrawing his silken robe from contact with the young lady, who ought to be in Bridewell, and who, out of mistaken indulgence, was permitted to be at large.

A change, she found to her unspeakable sorrow, had come over her friends at Claremont. Charlotte was affectionate, but sad and subdued; Manfred frowned gloomily, as if about to expostulate with the Alps in ever so many hundred lines of versed rhapsody. The angry missives of the Regent had had the desired effect, for Charlotte had wept copiously, and Leopold had been indignant; for was not his darling in the most interesting of situations, and was it not necessary, above all things, to save her from agitation? Cautious and careful as he was, it had never entered into the head of the Corsair that interest in a romantic case might be construed into a declaration of war. No one objected to the Dreadful Woman more than Leopold, for wherever she went

her baleful presence was sure to produce discord and annoyance, and though she was reserved on the subject, Charlotte had suffered more than enough at the hands of her misguided mother. When mother and daughter parted for the last time at Worthing, just before the Princess of Wales turned her back on her adopted country, the latter was so undisguisedly indifferent that poor Charlotte received a stab in her warm heart, and confessed reluctantly that it was well for all parties that the baleful presence should be removed. And to be harshly told now that she wanted to renew those distracting past scenes ! It was unkind and unjust. Was there to be no end to the misunderstandings between herself and her papa ? She would have been so f-f-fond of him, if he would let her, but he saw all her acts through d-d-darkened spectacles ; and with that the Princess buried her face in the Corsair's waistcoat, as her new and engaging habit was, and sobbed as if her heart would break. Under these circumstances the advent of Miss Rowe, with her eyes red from crying, was not a cause for unalloyed delight. Leopold even muttered something about intrusion, and was for sending hackney coach and occupant to the deuce. But Charlotte would not have it so ; she was vehemently resolved, and ladies in her situation must not be contradicted. She drew Abigel down on to the sofa by her side, and hand clasped in hand the two charmers mingled their

tears, and felt vastly better after it. Charlotte was ready to believe anything to the detriment of my lord Osmington, and knew Leo too well to suspect him of mean arts ; but neither she nor Leopold were prepared with practical advice. Was Abigel sure there were no other forgeries ? Oh yes ! she would stake her soul on it. Doubtless she would have said the same a week ago, smiled Leopold ; to which the maid replied more humbly than her wont, that the case was so very clear as to require no forgery of evidence. If that were really and truly so, pragmatically declared the schoolmaster, the best thing to do was to induce the Regent to instruct his Attorney-General to proceed with the investigation, putting aside the question of forgery till later. What of the other claimants ? Strangely enough they showed no hurry. Since the incarceration of their rival they had taken no further steps, and the case on their side, as well as the other, seemed like to flicker out as an expiring candle doth. That certainly was curious and unaccountable, and looked as if they were personally inimical to Leoline, more anxious to prevent him from inheriting than to win the prize themselves. Decidedly the best thing was to get the Regent to interfere ; but how was that to be achieved ? He was prejudiced against Leoline on account of the Princess of Wales, and in favour of Lord Osmington because he was his friend. It cer-

tainly would be very difficult to induce him to move. If the Princess Charlotte would employ her influence, suggested Abigel, with renewed hope ! No, returned the peremptory schoolmaster. No more crabbed missives and untoward agitations. The Princess Charlotte must hold aloof. Willing as he was to let her have her way, he was her husband, and in this would be obeyed.

Miss Rowe was exceedingly downcast. How easily are pipkins broken by iron pots ! 'Twas hard to be smitten hip and thigh on the very threshold of success, and look which way she would she could detect no way out of the maze. The starting of the claim had been managed without trouble, save the payment of sundry fees, for 'twas plain sailing and a mere formality. Through my lord Sidmouth, Secretary of State for the Home Department, a petition had been presented to the Prince Regent, praying him to call Leoline Jervois to the Upper House ; and the matter had been referred by his Royal Highness to his faithful Attorney-General, who was bidden to investigate and draw up a report. Any one might go so far by payment of sufficient guineas ; but then, what disaster had followed. The faithful Attorney-General had reported that the first claimant was not worthy of credence, and so far as he was concerned there was an end of the affair, unless his Royal Highness could be graciously induced to command a further investigation

The melancholy visage of the Corsair was hard set. He would listen to no idle pleadings. If his crew mutinied, they would be put in irons. Charlotte, though tearful and full of regret, showed no sign of revolt. The valiant little paladin must seek help from some other quarter. Mrs. Fitzherbert, who had been so kind and warm-hearted!—she was the one to ask. Abigel blamed herself for forgetting the friend who had promised to assist if ever she were in trouble. And she was in grievous trouble now, though not on her own account. Abigel bade farewell to the Princess, who, pressing her in her arms, whispered that she must not make a fool of herself with the *beau cousin*, but wait patiently for better times; and returned to town to acquaint Cyrus with this new defeat. Mr. Smalley said nothing. His own prospects were clouding over again, and he was torn by misgivings; for though he had not Mr. Kimpton's talent for seeing through a brick wall, he could not disguise from himself the fact that his *fiancée* displayed too poignant a despair over the affairs of Leoline. Why; if he, Cyrus, had entered the lists with Jack Randal, as the amateurs clamoured that he should, and had been unutterably punished and disgraced, his wife that was to be could not betray more emotion. She was for ever harping upon the young poet's angelic conduct in taking on himself undeserved blame, trickling with an admiration that was bitterness to Mr. Smalley.

At this rate she would be falling in love with the objectionable poet—straight off, in downright earnest—and there would be a kettle of fish. All the more reason that this peerage must be won for Leoline, to set him out of reach. Cyrus was more determined than ever to succeed. Let the maiden, then, do her best in her own way, but avoid more blundering. He would work according to his own lights, and between them it would be strange if they did not conquer yet.

Cy saw his cousin off by the Brighton coach, wrapped a cloak about her feet, and solemnly adjured the whip to be careful of the precious charge; and as she moved along the familiar road, each tree and rural tavern whispered of the past that was so near and yet so far. Sure 'twas a thousand years since, a lady of the first fashion, she had been tooled down by my lord and plucked cherries from that tree. There was the Cock at Sutton, of which Jackson was no longer landlord; and there, not a day older, was Miss Jeal, with her celebrated puddings, "All hot, all hot," the brothers and sisters of the puddings at which she had thought fit to jeer. Every thing and every person was the same except herself. Not all; for my lord was her friend and adopted father then, whereas now he was her direst enemy. And was the change her fault? Was she to blame in that things had turned topsy-turvy? If the clock could be reversed—if crabbed old Time could be seized by the beard and flung back,

would she act differently? No; except in this. With eyes opened now to dangers which then were hidden from her innocence, she would not have accepted the box-seat beside my lord, have worn his trinkets, or the frocks of his buying. That was the only difference she would make if events could occur again. Instead of running off after the masquerade like a timid fawn, she would never have ventured into the lion's den at all, but have remained content with her lowly lot in the banishment of distant Yorkshire. But what would have been her future? What that of Leo and his peerage then? Alackaday! At least, he would not have been in duress now through her fault. But it would not do to despond when she needed all her energy and strength of hope. What if this journey too proved vain? That could not be, for kind Mrs. Fitzherbert had promised help in time of need, and was not one to promise lightly.

For all that, Miss Rowe was filled with trepidation as she knocked at the well-known door upon the Steine, and her ankles felt weak as the servant took up her name. For she could see, as she tripped through Castle Square, into the Pavilion Gardens—new and stately private grounds, which once had been the Grove; and there in state under a spreading tree sat the Prince Regent with my lord and my lady Hertford a short distance off, Sir William Knighton in attendance, and fat Alvanley. The Grand Signor was expe-

tiating on a new invention—from his gestures this was evident, for now and again he rose and strutted up and down to show the fall in his back and the new garment which was christened “trousers.” This was odd and fickle on his part, for though the said garment was ere this the mode in France, his Royal Highness had always set his face against it; for, indeed, his lovely leg looked better in silk stockings. But anything for a change, to beguile his thoughts from mobs and riots and revilings and visions of the rampant woman, and that last picture burnt into his heart of dying Sheridan. He was quite engrossed by explanations of the advantages of trousers as Abigel tripped by, and the attendant gentlemen were swearing by all their gods that they would be similarly clad on the morrow.

“Oh, if I could only speak with him!” thought Abigel. “He is in a good humour to-day, and did me the honour once to think me worth his winning. The Guelphs, they say, never forget a face. Sure he’d remember mine.” The courageous girl hesitated a moment, and had half a mind to penetrate into the august presence and interrupt the sartorial dissertation, but prudence gained the day. It would never do to risk any more mistakes. If Mrs. Fitzherbert would intervene, all would certainly come right.

That lady received Miss Rowe with a benignant welcome, as if they had parted but yesterday. She must sit down and take off her things, for Miss Seymour

was in the town shopping, and would be so glad to see her. Miss Seymour was quite well, Heaven be thanked! grown pretty and charming ; at least all the young men said so, who were the best judges. Her guardian being prejudiced must refrain from offering an opinion. What brought Miss Rowe to Brighton ? Pity she had not sent up another name, for she ought to be married ere this—not that she would counsel precipitancy to young ladies. Miss Seymour had had many offers, but her guardian had always counselled prudence. “ Wait, my love, until you know your heart, and bestow it with deliberation on one who will be full of thanks.” And then the lady with the perfect profile and the careworn expression looked away out of the window, across the green, as if she saw something there besides fishing nets and idle strollers, and, sighing gently, inquired of her visitor in what she could be of use. As Abigel told her errand, a twitch of suffering crossed the patient face, and with trembling fingers she laid her tambour down. In sooth she had been making many false stitches.

“ You don’t know what you ask, my dear,” she whispered hurriedly. “ For Miss Seymour’s sake I have gone out into the world again of late. I met *him* at a ball at the Duke of Devonshire’s, and *he never spoke to me !* ” A spasm rose in the throat of the poor lady, which she had to gulp down before she could resume. “ It was not his fault,” she hastened to add. “ For

we agreed that on many counts it would be best to meet henceforth as strangers, and yet—and yet—it was very hard to bear."

Mrs. Fitzherbert had risen, and leaned against the window-shutter, looking out into the sunshine. Poor lady! How she must have suffered, and with what angelic meekness did she endure her martyrdom! King George had sown the wind, and had reaped the whirlwind. The sins of the wretched man had been visited with awful retribution; but the old Queen remained unpunished for her share in the work, unless a loveless old age can be looked upon as punishment—an old age enslaved by avarice.

Forgetting her own strait in the presence of dolour borne with such noble dignity, Abigel followed the elder lady to where she stood, and raised her hand to her lips. "Forgive me," she murmured, "for adding to your sorrow. Forgive, and think well of me. Good-bye."

Ere Mrs. Fitzherbert had recovered her composure, the girl had glided from the room, and was gone. The little paladin at once made up her mind, and skimming past the Castle Inn, marched boldly into the grounds of the Pavilion. The Grand Signor was still there, imbibing curaçoa with his leg up, for showing off the garment had brought on a twinge of gout, and so much exertion called for light refreshment. He did not look so good-humoured as when strutting up

and down ; but Abigel had gone too far to recede. She fearlessly approached the group ; while my lady Hertford raised her eyebrows and stared at the newcomer.

“ I am Abigel Rowe,” the maiden said. “ Your Royal Highness used to like me once—has danced with me on this very green, when it was public ground.”

“ Dear heart ! Euphrosyne, who enslaved us all ! ” cried Alvanley. “ I thought you dead.”

“ God bless my soul ! ” ejaculated the Grand Signor. “ Prettier than ever, I declare. Delighted to see you again, my dear. Be seated, pray ! ”

His Royal Highness was always, to the end of his days, the humble servant of a pretty face ; and, seeing encouragement in his cordial greeting, the young lady without more ado told her story for the third time, and so glibly that she had finished ere she could be stopped. Not that any one attempted to interrupt the tale. My lady Hertford looked up once or twice, and nodded significantly, as if to say, “ I told you so ! The last of the flock is the blackest sheep of all ! ” while my lord Hertford ogled the narrator through his quizzing glasses, and regretted that she should never have been to supper at the retreat in Seomore Place. By the time the tale was told, the good humour of the Grand Signor had given place to settled peevishness. Who would be a Prince of Wales to be teased and annoyed and worried without an instant of peace ?

Every one from my lords Liverpool and Castlereagh downwards continued to crumple his rose leaves. Verily, when his royal parent, still a boy, shut himself up in Buckingham House and watered ferns, declining to see my lord Bute or any of his ministers on the subject of Wilkes and '45, he was in the right. A wall should be erected round the Pavilion grounds, as wide and high as the one of China, and sentinels be placed at the gates to keep *atra cura* out. But then *atra cura* has wings and seven-league boots and other adjuncts, which defy walls and sentinels. Little girls have not, anyhow; the impudent vixens. The Regent prepared to give the maid a bit of his mind; but her heaving bosom was so pretty under its muslin covering, the ruby lips so eloquent, the sparkling eyes so imploring, that being only a man, though an august one, his Royal Highness refrained, and took some more liqueur. Those suspicions which from time to time had fluttered and turned over like an autumn leaf in a wanton breeze, were caught now by the blast and buzzed round his head. It was a relief to know that Charlotte was interested for Abigel's sake, not Leoline's or Caroline's, and that he need not dread trouble from that quarter with respect to the *bête noire*. The conduct of Vere towards the youth had been peculiar; there was no gainsaying it. The Regent had several times considered it questionable; but, jaundiced, as concerned

the boy, because he was the Dreadful Woman's *protégé*, he had considered the subject as little as possible. It was humiliating and grievous to be convinced that a chosen friend of youth should be so wicked. The last too. Yet there were things which he had said and done from time to time which bore witness against him now. Why did he 'prentice the lad to a blacksmith? Why did he wish to obtain for him a commission in a West Indian regiment? No doubt it was by the advice of his royal master, too carelessly given, that he had pursued the young man, and locked him up. From her pursed lips and virtuous aspect it was plain what my lady Hereford thought, and Sir William Knighton also, for that matter. Driven in a corner by the eloquent appeal of the gipsy advocate, his Royal Highness gave way, and promised before the assembled company that Sir Samuel Shepherd should be commanded to take the all-important subject up again, and sift it to the bottom.

Abigel could hardly believe her ears. After so much disappointment, was it possible that her cause was gained? For gained it was she was certain if, the odious letter set aside, the case were allowed to proceed. Revulsion from anguish to hope made her sick and faint. My lord Hertford rushed for a chair; my lady patted her on the cheek benignly, for she had been countermining the influence of Lord Osmington this long while, and was disposed to look kindly on

the knight-errant who helped to upset him from the saddle. Where was the young lady staying ? What ! all by herself ! How very shocking ! Lord Hertford proposed that my lady should put her up, for a night at least. “ She told a tale so well, that 'twould be charming to hear more. Quite as well as What's-her-name in the ‘ Arabian Nights.’ What a ghostly place this Battle Magna must be from all accounts, for possession of which there was so much heartburning ! Ah, the gardens ! He had heard they were mighty fine. His Royal Highness had been there ? Indeed ! Had he been privileged to behold the witch who had ridden on a broomstick ? No ! A pity, for such sights were rare.” So Abigel was made much of, and returned to town next day quite another girl.

CHAPTER X.

COUNTERCHECK.

CYRUS saw his cousin off, and applied his mind to thought. As things were, no one would put faith in the story of Lord Osmington having laid a gin in a lapis-lazuli cabinet to catch the feet of the unwary. How to unmask him? There lay the difficulty. The burning of those letters, the full significance of which was long in penetrating the skull of Mr. Smalley, now shone forth in all its turpitude. But if he were to go about telling this story, people would no more believe it than the other. There was no one to speak to the scene in the bedroom except himself, and it was notorious that he, Cyrus, was a discarded dependant of Osmington House. "No thoroughfare" in that direction. The best thing to be done was to go and consult with his trusty ally and adopted father, Mr. Thomas Cribb, whose advice, when induced to speak, was generally worldly-wise. "It is settled," still rang in the ears of poor Cy like a dirge of death, strive as he would to banish from memory

the mournful cadence. Was the future he had planned never to come to pass, after all? Ah, well! there was nothing to be gained by soul-fretting on the subject just now. It never should be said that he had not done his very best to win his heart's desire. He would go and take counsel of Mr. Cribb as to the unearthing of the wicked mole.

Thomas sat sucking his pipe in the cosy bar of the Lion, his eyes turned from time to time admiringly towards an emblazoned legend over the fireplace.

“ Beer in galore;
After that more,”

ran the distich in Gothic letters; and Mr. Cribb, as he surveyed it between puffs of the best Virginia, considered it brief, poetic, and to the point. Thomas was out of a job, and in the doldrums, and delighted to embrace his boy. Truth to tell, time hung heavily on his hands. The movement adverse to pugilism was gaining ground, though the court of fond admirers still hovered round the heroes, clapping them on the back and drinking their health in bumpers. But there were signs which might not be mistaken that the halcyon time was on the wane. The royal princes were no longer young enough to find pleasure in sanded parlours and draughts of heavy wet. Certain counties declared with emphasis that they would have no more fighting within their borders. The Fancy went furtively about their work, as if there was

something to be ashamed of; skulked down byways instead of rattling openly along the high-road in tiptop holiday gear. This depressing condition of affairs, heart-breaking to one who viewed the noble art from its better aspect, was attributed by the Champion of England to a decadence in the style of boxing and undue patronage of the Hebrew school. Randal had done well so far as he went, and might likely enough some day be worth looking at. But how could he get on and shine when there was no worthy antagonist against whom to pit him? Tom Spring, Cribb's new pupil, was not doing badly; but somehow there was a screw loose somewhere, or, at least, Cribb chose to think so, being in a dejected mood. He wist not that Randal would ere long be known to an admiring world under the flattering sobriquet of "The Nonpareil." The Champion was growing old, and was inclined, after the fashion of the elderly, to look askance at the present, and compare it unfavourably with the past. Men of his own standing fell thick and fast around him, and he was apt to sigh over his pipe and regret among other disappointments the retirement of Cyrus. Cy did not tell him that Abigel had withdrawn her objection to his returning to his profession; for he was quite resolved not to take advantage of her magnanimity. What, then, was the use of courting argument on a subject concerning which his resolution was fixed?

No. While she told her story at Brighton, he told his in town ; and the worthy Thomas laid down his favourite clay in mute astonishment at the singular behaviour of Caleb.

“ Well, I never—no, I never did ! ” he repeated, wagging his bullet head the while. “ Whoever would have supposed that such a lawless scum would have had any good in him ? Well, there ! It shows that the misguided, rowdy lad has his heart in the right place, though buried, to be sure, under a heap of rubbish. To think that he should be able to admire his conqueror ! I’ll never speak ill of a man any more ; and am sorry now that I refused him your address.”

“ Refused him my address ? ” echoed Cy.

“ Yes. He’s in the Fleet, poor devil, and like to stop there. I did not know he had a claim upon you, so I would not say where you were to be found.”

“ In the Fleet ! That should not be. I’ll go and see him at once,” cried Cy, with generous alacrity. “ Put on your hat and coat, we’ll go together.”

The Pink of Bow was in a dismal plight when the two friends found him, and they sought long among a labyrinth of dirty rooms and foul passages, which from year to year were never swept, ere they came upon their quest. Cy looked serious, and Cribb felt unwell ; for ‘twas terrible to see fellow-sinners reduced to the condition of the lowest beasts, perishing by

inches, some of hideous disease, some from vulgar want. Could any one say where was the Pink of Bow, erst a well-known prize-fighter ? Some glanced listlessly on the strangers, as though the outer world was cut off from them for ever ; others stared wolfishly with an eye to garnish ; a few retained a phantom scrap of humour yet, despite their weight of care.

"If he's a prisoner, guess he's somewhere about," giggled one, with an arch wink. "'Tain't likely he's strolling in the park !'"

"Will you give me two bob to find him, guv'ors ?" asked a second.

"And a pint of daffy in," suggested a third, who did not wish that the market should be spoiled ; "and a go of lightning ?"

"A prize-fighter ?" said a fourth, reflectively. "There's such a power of brawling in our yards that it's hard to tell the professional from the amatoor."

"I know ! He's where you'll never look for him," a tiny wizened man piped shrilly, holding his rags together with his grimy claws, lest haply they should leave him naked. "I'll pint 'im out for a bender. That's cheap enough."

Cribb in disgust tossed a shilling to the tattered wight, who gabbled and clutched it like a monkey, and ambled rapidly down the stairs, lest the spoil should be wrested from his fevered grip by some pouncing bird of prey.

"He's on dooty ; that's where he is," whispered the tiny prisoner. "If you go into the street, you'll find him in the cage ; or the turnkey 'll pull 'im out by the scruff of the neck, if you make it worth his while."

"In the cage ?" asked Cyrus.

"Unfortunate wretch !" groaned Cribb. "I know what he means. I've seen 'em. Just think of coming down to be treated like a poll parrot !"

In the old days of that horrible plague-spot, now happily cauterized away, there was a recess in the outer wall of the Fleet prison, closed by heavy iron bars, like the lion's den in a menagerie, within which the abject, ragged creatures on the poor side took their turns to sit for a given number of hours, rattling a money-box, and beseeching the passers-by to "remember the poor debtors !" People were compassionate, and generally gave a trifle; for it was well-known that some had nothing else to live on but this precarious relief, though perchance 'twould have been kinder to let them starve at once rather than prolong their wretchedness. True enough, there was the Pink of Bow, once so smart and trim, given to slap-up togs and rorty kicksies. His cheeks were gaunt and hollow, his chin unshorn, his hair hanging in elf-locks. Famine had done its work upon his splendid muscles. There would be no difficulty in beating him now !

"Remember the pore debtors! Remember the pore debtors!" he whined piteously, with his eyes closed; but opened them wide, with a start and shiver, as Cyrus ejaculated "Caleb!"

"Poor fellow! I'm so sorry; never knew of this till half an hour since," he explained. "There's money of yours held in trust, you know; for the monument was found, just as you said."

Caleb's worn features worked, and he passed a sooty hand over his grimy face. "Glad to see you at last," he grunted, all the swagger gone. "I wouldn't have the reward, for it was a pleasure to give you the information; but times are changed, you see, and beggars can't be choosers. If you'll go into the yard, I'll get somebody else to take this infernal duty."

The Pink of Bow was a melancholy object when he showed himself under the square of daylight within the four high walls. His dandy coat and vest had been parted with on entering to supply the necessary garnish, or toll of drink, claimed by his future associates. In frequent fights his shirt had been torn in strips, and to replace it he had got a frowsy sack, which was tied with string about his neck. But others were as badly off, or worse, than he; for the tattered blanket, which was the only safeguard against the cold at night, was obliged in many cases to serve as morning attire as well, worn in the manner of a poncho. In squalid groups the gaol-

birds sprawled in the sun, close together, for mutual warmth; such as could achieve so rare a luxury smoking tobacco; those who could not, sniffing the fragrant fumes, or sleeping the time away. But the presence of two well-dressed men parading up and down the yard created a diversion, and roused the sleepiest from dreams. Experienced eyes appraised the white bell-hat of Mr. Cribb, his leather breeches, and neat top boots, and gazed with hungry envy at the handsome bunch of seals that dangled from his fob. The swells had come to claim a prisoner, to pay his debts, and set him free. "Hooray! Three cheers for the jolly gentlemen;" for by immemorial custom a departing prisoner was obliged to stand drinks all round. But they were disappointed in their hopes, for the present at least; for Cyrus expounded to Caleb, who sighed fretfully, that Madam Ambrosia Cotton was no longer in England, and that the reward could not be got at without delays and formalities.

"How much are you in for? If it is small, it might be managed," inquired Cribb.

"A hundred and fifty pounds," groaned Caleb. "And if that were paid, Lord Osmington would be down on me for his paltry debt. Oh, ain't he wicked and spiteful? ain't he just?" This remark of Rann's was spoken with a deep conviction, in which was a flavour of admiration. To be ordinarily peccant is commonplace; to be complete, in whatever way,

deserves its appreciative tribute ; and the wretched Pink, though himself the victim, could not withhold his meed of respect for the way in which my lord had kept his promise of crushing him like a beetle. “For fear of him,” he observed, “there ain’t a blessed pal as would give me a mag, or a drop of water for my tongue if I was in torment. And what did I do to bring on me his vengeance ? I didn’t sell the fight ; all agreed that I fought as well as you. Both can’t win, that’s certain. Oh, he is wicked and spiteful ; if he’s not, I’m blowed !” All things considered, Cy was not likely to disagree with this sentiment, and Caleb displayed a curiosity to know what evil the brilliant sinner had worked on his antagonist. “You ain’t starved like me,” he said, “nor yet in rags. Sure you’ve escaped his fangs ?”

Whereupon Cyrus told him of the imprisonment of Leoline, and the collapse of his lofty pretensions. In the midst of the relation Caleb stopped in his walk, and, with a long low whistle, slapped his thigh.

“He’s splendid—magnificent !” the bruiser exclaimed ; “but I’ll be even with him ! ’Tis plain enough why he buried me alive. ’Twas less trouble than purchasing my silence. Why, those Houndsditch chaps are a blind—men of straw to frighten blackbirds ! It was I who told him of them and of the tomb in the city churchyard.”

Here was intelligence indeed ! If it could be shown

that my lord had got up a bogus counter-claim to throw dust in the eyes of the Attorney-General, and by complications cause postponement, it would go far to break down his credit, and induce the public to believe that so noble a personage could condescend to the laying of gins.

As for Cribb, he was dismayed. Like most of his craft, he adored the aristocracy, for to the highest in the land he had never looked in vain for patronage of his cherished art. If this were true, my lord was no more than a common scoundrel, whose proper dwelling-place was Botany Bay, his fitting home the hulks. Complete forsooth ! Mr. Cribb being an honest man, simple-minded and confiding withal, saw nothing to admire in a noble lord who could practise the arts of the felon. "And he the President of the Pugilistic Club !" the Champion groaned in tribulation. Had he not been right in deciding that things were going to the dogs ? The enemies of the noble art would say that the contaminating society of boxers had warped his moral sense. It was another blow at the Fancy. Preachers would prate and moralists would jabber, and many would really be convinced by their windy platitudes. It was a good thing that Jem Belcher had not survived to see this day. Would that he, the Champion, were equally at rest ; for 'tis saddening as you go down the shady side of the hill to see your temples totter, the gods of your veneration prone

before their altars! The grief of the good man was Dutch to the Pink of Bow. He looked on the noble amateurs as so many money-bags, to be squeezed by any device. So he turned to the Sprig as the more practical person of the twain, and said, "Come, a bargain's a bargain. Get me out of this hell, and bring me face to face with the men of straw, and you'll see that they'll shrivel away like so much scorched grass."

"We've money in hand, thanks to the Princess Charlotte," cried Cy with glee; for already he saw the bugbear Leoline freed from duress, established in his earldom, swept out of his path; the tender bosom no longer racked and harrowed; the little brown left hand with a golden hoop of his placing on the third finger. "To-morrow, or next day, you'll be free, and can ruffle it once more in the most expensive kicksies."

Cy was for running off that minute to see to the liberation of the prisoner; but Mr. Cribb, the wise counsellor, having got over the first throes of his chagrin, bade him bide awhile and adopt a more prudent course.

"If the man's such a scamp," he said, "we must fight him with his own weapons. If the Pink were set free, with money in his pocket, he could not resist the old temptations. We should have him making an exhibition of himself in Bond Street, running amuck

which would land him as usual in the dock. My lord would hear of it before the day was out; would know that a man whom he had maltreated and made his enemy was unchained; and would take steps to tie him up again. If the Pink is to be of use to us," concluded the Champion, "my lord must not learn that he has friends—must be left in the belief that his sham claimants are secure from showing up."

"Do you mean to say I'm to be left here?" demanded Caleb, scowling. "A nice sort of friend, you are, Mr. Cribb, who refused me the Sprig's address, and now——"

"Silence!" retorted the Champion, sternly. "You've got to show that you are to be trusted. If I am suspicious, whom have you to thank but yourself? We'll get a day rule for you to-morrow; you shall go with us to Houndsditch, and interview these blackguards; and we'll see if you speak truth. At night-fall you shall return here as the custom is, and my lord will know nothing about it."

Caleb was restive for awhile. He would not stop here to be made a fool of, not he; a tool to be used and thrown aside. He might be rowdy, and given to escapades, but was capable of control in an emergency —would perform miracles to bring about the downfall of my lord, who had behaved so abominably ill to him. Would the Champion give a fair trial to see if he could not be trusted to behave himself? To all of

which Mr. Cribb responded firmly that he would give him a trial, but must keep him muzzled for all that, seeing the dangers which might accrue from a false step. If Caleb could control himself, he must show it now. For his own sake the effort must be made ; for if my lord were undone, he, Rann, could resume the practice of his profession without fear of further persecution.

And so it was arranged. A decent suit of clothes was sent to the charge of the head turnkey, who undertook to have his man dressed and washed and shaved in his own sanctum, away from the other prisoners—fit to reappear in the world ; and to give him his rags again when he returned. And at precisely ten the following morning the Champion and his boy met the refurbished bruiser at the gate, and the three strolled gently eastwards.

“ Who are these people ? ” inquired Cy. “ What do you know about ‘em ? ”

“ Never you mind,” chuckled the other. “ Wait a bit. I know summat as ’ll squash ‘em both when the time arrives, as my lord tried to squash me.”

The tailor’s affairs seemed vastly to have improved of late. An inscription had been added beneath the picture on the swinging sign to the effect that the owner of the establishment was patronized by the nobility. The master snip no longer sat cross-legged on his counter, spectacles on nose ; but com-

manded a brigade of young ones, who looked on their chief with awe. When the trio entered his shop, he passed his ringed fingers through his hair and smirked, as much as to say, "See, I have told no lies. The gentry from the West are weary of Stultz and such bunglers, and must even come to me." Would the gentlemen please be seated? Those leather breeches were terribly unmodish—queer relics of Beau Brummel's day, who had been dead a thousand years. The real thing now was something loose and careless. His Royal Highness the Prince Regent had set the fashion; and who should know how a nob should be attired if not the first gentleman in Europe?

"For the moment, the newcomers did not need clothes," Mr. Rann replied, "though they would look at patterns with an eye to a future day, while Mr. Jarvis sent for his brother, who lived somewhere close at hand."

The tailor seemed taken aback. What did they want with his brother? "He dwelt just there, a few doors off; perhaps they would deign to step over to him?"

"Certainly they would," declared the accommodating Rann, "if Mr. Jarvis, the tailor, would kindly show the way."

The tailor looked suspicious. These, he saw, were not members of the nobility, though, now that Brummel was gone, it was as difficult as ever to tell

a lord from his groom. Two of the trio were over-healthy for nobles, pink and white, with immense breadth of beam and ponderous shoulders ; the third appeared delicate, but 'twas a low-bred face—not aristocratic. Could they be robin redbreasts in disguise ? To think that in the bosom of Mr. Jarvis, the tailor, there should lurk a fear of Bow Street runners ! He put on his hat without remark, and, bidding his serfs be diligent, crossed the road to the fishmonger's. The latter was not so superior a creature as his brother — had not bloomed forth into boasts of patronage. It would have caused remark if he had chosen to state that Dukes and Duchesses sent to Houndsditch for their fish. He was the younger, and would not share the mantle ; hence, perchance, his humility. The trio had discovered, by stopping for refreshment at a neighbouring tavern, that no word had been breathed in this quarter about any pretensions to a peerage. This, perhaps, may account for the fact that the fishmonger turned white, and that his lip trembled, when Mr. Rann, without beating about the bush, congratulated the pair on their chance of achieving greatness. He knew not what to answer, and glanced uneasily from under lowered lids at the placid gentleman with rings. Mr. Jarvis, the snip, during the short transit from one house to another, had had time to collect his thoughts. He had wished to conceal his pretensions for the present from

cackling neighbours, but it was in the course of things that the story should leak out. So he replied with complete calm, and a slight drawl, that he was obliged for the gentleman's congratulations. Did he also belong to the Upper 'Ouse ? 'Twould be nice to meet there and chat.

"It's a rum story, ain't it ? " Caleb said reflectively. "To think that the fugitive feller should escape from the wars and settle in these parts. What might have been his style of business ? Did he turn tailor in his old age, or fishmonger ? Which of the two dwellings was hisn ? In truth, they were both ramshackly enough to have belonged to Methusalem himself. And what, by the way, was the date of the flat tombstone at St. Botolph's ? "

"Who are you, and what do you know of us ? " the fishmonger asked nervously.

"Knew this part of town pretty well once," Mr. Rann remarked ; "also the flat tombstone ; remembered seeing lads play marbles on it many a time in younger days."

"Our ancestor, James Jarvis's tomb," replied the tailor stiffly, "dates from 1749 ; so that, having fought at Derby in 1745, he was not long spared."

"Pity," nodded Caleb pleasantly. "What lies folks tell ! The woman who shook the cushions at St. Botolph's used to lecture the boys as they played her tricks about the doors, and point to that gent's tomb as

a lesson. For, she said, he was like Mr. Hogarth's good 'prentice : came to town without a penny to bless himself withal, and married his master's daughter. Not true, of course ? ”

“ Certainly not true,” the tailor drawled, with well-bred languor ; while his less accomplished brother sat down in the obscurity at the back of the shop, and locked his fingers nervously. “ Whoever you may be, sir, you are not my father confessor. What is it you want—out with it ? ”

“ Merely came to warn you in a friendly sort of way that you'll lose your ease, as sure as eggs is eggs. Come now, don't your consciences tell you that you must lose ? ”

The fishmonger glanced up, and was about to say something, when his brother interrupted quickly. “ Hold your tongue ! ” he snapped. “ If you are only here, gents, to waste our time,” he said, “ the sooner you be off the better. A caveat has been entered by my solicitor to bar the idle claim of some ill-conditioned person.”

“ All right ! ” returned Caleb. “ Do as you like. I've warned you ; ” and with that he strutted away, followed by Tom and Cyrus, both of whom were mystified.

“ What's your game ? ” asked the latter presently.

“ To frighten 'em,” Caleb replied, looking at the Champion, in hopes of a commanding word. “ They'll

guess that if I know that much, I'm likely to know more, and will back out, leaving my lord in the lurch. That's the game."

Thomas withered the Pink of Bow with a glance of extreme contempt. "Pah!" he said. "Ass that I was to trust you. They'll put my lord on his guard, and all the fat'll be in the fire! What is this precious affair that you're keeping dark—some nursery fable, I warrant?"

Caleb was deeply hurt, and answered sulkily, "Not so silly as I look. Free me from debt, and get me out of quod, and I'll speak up when the time comes. If you don't, I'm mum. Sorry, old pal," he added, turning to Cyrus. "Sorry to have to make terms. Trust me, and I'll keep the gag on, s'help me, till you take it off yourself, and serve you proper. Your Mr. Cribb is trying to get on the blind side."

Mr. Cribb, indeed, was loth to put faith in the Pink, wherein he erred on the side of caution. Could he have looked in then on the fishmonger, after the departure of the trio, he would have beheld that worthy in a condition of extreme alarm.

After contemplating his agony for a while, the tailor said, "Since you are such a puling ninny, you'll have to disappear. They don't know anything, I tell you; came sniffing about in hopes of our betraying ourselves. Anyway, I'll go up to my lord to-morrow and report."

"I would to Heaven we'd left it alone. We shall get into trouble; mark me!"

"Fool!" sneered the snip, who thoughtfully returned to his own establishment, to overlook the proceedings of his serfs.

CHAPTER XI.

CY RISKS HIS BONES.

MR. SMALLEY spent the evening with the Champion, and argued the question with him. Caleb was a queer customer, a very queer customer, who required to be treated gingerly. If it was he who had first directed the attention of my lord to these Houndsditch people, and if he declared himself possessed of knowledge concerning them, such as would make them harmless, surely there was only one thing to do—to trust him? As for the amount of debt, he, Cyrus, had money left out of the sum won by his celebrated victory, and it could not be better spent than in securing the translation of bugbear Leoline to exalted spheres. The next morning, therefore, saw Caleb released and full of gratitude to his conqueror. There was nothing he would not do for him. He would obey Cy's orders implicitly. It was settled accordingly that the Pink should for the present lie concealed under the care of Gentleman Jackson, who undertook to manage the unruly ruffian and produce him whenever necessary.

So when Abigel returned from the queen of watering-places, and poured forth for the delectation of her cousin the successful result of her ambassage, he was able to add to the good news, and show that he had not been idle. "Oh, was it not too delicious ?" she cried, quite her glad self again. "It was worth while to encounter obstacles for the pleasure of seeing them dissolve." She flew to Leoline ; bade him be of good cheer, since all was coming right ; promised that his foe should be unmasked immediately. He hoped it might be so, sighed Leo, who, absorbed in sketching out a poem in five cantos, was quite calm and composed. The quiet of his prison (there were none to offer bail) seemed to act soothingly upon his nerves, and Abby was satisfactorily convinced that there was a spice of the heroic in her friend's unworldliness. But she wished he would look less ardently into the depths of her dark eyes, for, despite herself, the tell-tale blood would rise to her cheek and tingle there.

When, full of the Regent's promise, she presented herself at Sergeants' Inn, she found Sir Samuel Shepherd more icily polite than ever. He had received instructions to proceed with the investigation of the claim, he acknowledged readily enough, and would do so at his leisure ; but the young lady must be aware that there was a caveat, and that he must wait, before proceeding, until the other claimants were ready. Fair play was a jewel, and it should never be said

that in his quality of inquisitor he leaned to one side or the other. "There aren't any other claimants," cried the damsel, who proceeded volubly to declare that the Houndsditch people were rank impostors, who could be shown up, and that Sir Samuel would do well to wash his hands of them at once. The Attorney-General grew stiffer and more icy. A backbiting as well as a forging damsel! Never would the astute forensic dignitary trust himself again as a judge of character; for candour shone out of her face, while her tongue all the while was forming the most objectionable fibs. Always harping, too, on the same foolish string. Was it probable that a nobleman, friend of the Prince Regent, should stoop? etc., etc. Sir Samuel would obey his royal master's behest; but time, dear madam, must be allowed, for the car of Justice is a ponderous vehicle which cannot be driven at a trot. Cruel, cruel lawyer, to turn the deaf ear of the adder to lovely and impatient woman! Would he not name a day very soon for the sifting of the contradictory evidence—fix a positive date for the breaking of this suspense?

There was no objection to fixing a date, no objection whatever. Say that day fortnight. The solicitor for the other side should be warned to appear with evidence and witnesses, and the vexed question could be set at rest before the Long Vacation. With that Miss Rowe was forced to be content. Fourteen days

would soon pass. She forwarded instructions to Mr. Kimpton, in order that, fully primed, the batteries might open with a brilliant discharge of artillery, and send the foe scuttling off after the first fire.

At last the long-wished-for morning arrived, and the waiting-room was filled with a noisy throng of country folk clad in Sunday gear. The commander-in-chief wore a new gauze hat and amber feather, and the sweetest lutestring frock and sandalled shoon. Her eyes were beaming with the certainty of triumph. Cyrus also seemed full of hope, quietly confident and happy. Betty Higgs from the almshouse was in an ecstasy of admiration, so was her decrepit spouse from the male side; for never in all their long lives before had they travelled more than twenty miles from Stratton, and it was a marvellous thing that in extreme old age their old bones should be rattled in the flying stage over the immense expanse of road which lay between London and York. How Betty would crow over Sally Scraggs when she got back to the almshouse! What experiences of travel she would relate to an awe-stricken circle, and how utterly Madam Scraggs would be discomfited! No more ignominious trouncings with the mop endured with Christian fortitude. She would take her position in the small world of Stratton as a great explorer, who had successfully faced untold dangers by flood and field, and would be treated with proportionate respect. And

what capital in the matter of loaves and fishes she would make of the hair-breadth 'scapes of the journey, impressing on the new lord that when the wheel came off at Peterborough she nearly broke her precious neck; but that, knowing the extreme value of her evidence, she had, solely on his account, clung like a cat to the roof by teeth and talons, and so escaped the peril! On second thoughts she would not return to the almshouse, except for a few days wherein to triumph over Sally Scraggs, moving then with her equally decrepit husband into some cosy cottage, whose cupboard should always be provided with tea and snuff and strong waters, replenished by invisible agency like the legendary widow's cruise. It was to be deplored that the turn of good fortune should come so late in life; but, pampered and coddled as she resolved to be, existence would be indefinitely prolonged. Having thus settled the future to her own satisfaction, Betty Higgs was burning to give evidence and have done with it, in order that she might enter on millennium with the least possible delay. How much longer were they to sit in this waiting-room? The hours were flying. Though Betty had done justice to breakfast, she began to feel peckish. Her experienced spouse was provided with a convenient bottle, from which the couple from time to time sought sustenance. Sir Samuel had named ten o'clock, and it was now one. Abigel, growing anxious, began to

suspect new complications. Her phalanx of witnesses was there—the parson of the parish where Hans and Naomi had been united, with his book; the house-keeper from Crows' Liberties; even the silent witness in its box, which had opened the lips of Pentecost. But where was the opposition? A solicitor was in waiting to watch the case for Lord Osmington, and Mr. Townshend, Windsor Herald from the College of Arms; but the tailor and the fishmonger were conspicuous by their absence. They had not even sent an attorney. Two o'clock struck, and three, and four. Betty Higgs collapsed from hunger, and, drivelling in a corner, wished she had stopped at home. The worthy blacksmith glanced at Miss Rowe for encouragement, but met with no response. It took all her energy to mask her own agitation. At last a hovering clerk put his head out from an inner room, and, with exasperating want of interest, commanded the company to disperse, as the investigation was postponed.

Postponed! Why? What had happened now? All the good folks present had made a tedious and expensive journey. Surely Sir Samuel would not be so fiendish as to send them home without a hearing? Where was the Attorney-General? Sure he had not beaten a retreat by a back-door? Miss Rowe insisted upon seeing Sir Samuel. The Prince Regent should be informed straightway of his gross lack of courtesy,

whereby he had flown in the face of that magnifico. Such treatment was outrageous, shameful ! Indignation added a full inch to the height of Abigel, and Sir Samuel, arriving on the scene by reason of the uproar, was struck with her resolute courage. It was a pity she should tell fibs and forge documents ; yet, despite these peccadilloes, there was something admirable in her obstinacy, in the unscrupulous neck-or-nothing way in which she fought her battle. He was seriously hurt and annoyed, he explained with diminished iciness, at the behaviour of the opposition. Setting aside all other business, he had waited the entire day, and they never showed a sign of existence. It was unprofessional on the part of their solicitor. He should either have made good the entering of his caveat or have withdrawn it. For so flagrant a piece of impertinence he ought to be struck off the Rolls. "Then surely," suggested Miss Rowe timidly, "the case can go on without them?" The conduct of these mysterious persons was merely vexatious, as she had already had the honour of saying, and it was unfair that others should suffer by reason of their insolence.

"No," responded Sir Samuel. "They might"—he hoped they might—"be able to give a satisfactory explanation. Tiles fall on people's heads sometimes and interfere with appointments ; they slip up and break their legs inopportunely. The investigation must be deferred again. They must have a fair

chance of hearing. It was unfortunate that the Long Vacation should be so close at hand." Involved as he was in clouds of business, Sir Samuel regretted that it would be impossible to proceed until after the usual holiday. This much would be gained by the delay—the opposition would be unable with decency to demand more time, and would either come forward out of the shadow and make good their claim, or show that they were windbags.

After the Long Vacation! Miss Rowe was in despair. Would not Sir Samuel at least take the evidence of these poor folk now that they were all assembled, and reserve his judgment? Here was a parson who wanted to return to his flock; a parcel of aged men and women who could not, like wandering Jews, be always on the move. It was hard on the claimant that he should have to keep them so long in London at his own expense. The Attorney-General, with infinite regret, declared that it was impossible. After the Long Vacation the matter should be gone into, then and not before.

Accidents cause us to make strange friendships, bring incongruous elements into whimsical juxtaposition. In the old days of Almack's, Abigel would have laughed had she been told that she would form one of a committee of which the other members should be pugilists. Yet so it came to pass; for she sat in solemn conclave with closed doors in the company of Gentleman Jack-

son, Cribb, Cy, and Caleb, to consider the new trouble in all its bearings, and avert the possibility of more. "You are a dear and faithful sturdy staff whereon to lean," she said fondly to her cousin; "please Heaven that I may make up for your devotion. Am I not preparing, sir, to assume my destined place? Papa Cribb treats me like a daughter; a man worthy of all respect, now that I know him better; and your Gentleman Jackson is estimable, and sufficiently genteel, if blunt. Indeed, I ought to be grateful, for I am touched by their gentle kindness." Poor Cy! The vista opened was too bright, and fairly dazzled him. Was his heart's desire to be, after all, so completely gratified? Was he mistaken in his fears? Was it really possible that the chosen one, abandoning scruples and forgetting prejudices, would truly take by choice to the serving of raw beefsteaks? Stranger things have chanced. How Thomas would rejoice if his boy were to come to him some day and request him to supervise his training! But no; too clear a morning ends in rain. And yet it was surprising to observe with what respect the imperious maid hearkened unto the words of Thomas, weighing his opinions as of acknowledged value. The deliberations of the secret council were sapient, overflowing with sagacity. Caleb winked his eyes and looked unutterable things when the talk was of the Hounds-ditch people. If he was possessed of such important

intelligence with regard to them, why not speak at once and have done with it? No; all in good time. My lord did not know that a sword was hanging over his head, the string attached to which Caleb intended to cut with his own knife; but Caleb knew it, and liked to see it swinging.

Meanwhile, Lord Osmington took matters quietly enough. His position from some points of view was awkward; but he hoped, by playing a judicious, waiting game, to cope with the situation. Already he had gained several tricks. A series of indistinct obstacles deftly placed will for a long while defy removal, and when time is gained, accident steps in, often enough, to help the schemer. His Houndsditch phantoms had proved vastly useful, jibbering as they did in the dark. Of course, they would not bear daylight; but, such as they were, my lord was pleased with them. Immediately after the futile visit to the City, the tailor, as Cribb prophesied, went to Osmington House for orders. Somebody was sniffing about, he said, who had frightened his nervous brother out of his wits. Was not my lord satisfied? Would he kindly pay what he had promised, and allow his *employés* to show a clean pair of heels? No; my lord was not satisfied. The gentleman with the bell-shaped hat, set on jauntily, was easily recognizable, but was, outside his profession, perfectly harmless. If Cribb was foolish enough to meddle, 'twas, of

course, to please his favourite, who was sniffer No. 2. No. 3 my lord could not recognize (supposing Caleb to be in prison, he never thought of suspecting him); but, doubtless, he was a low person of the same kidney, and in nowise dangerous. "Go back," he said, "and don't be nervous; but get rid of your brother, who wriggles like a worm that's trodden on, and courts suspicion. We've the Long Vacation before us. Till the lawyers come back and pull out their papers, no one can hurt a hair of your head. When that time arrives, we'll see how things stand, and act accordingly."

The snip went away comforted, and my lord reflected again that he had every reason to be pleased with his puppets. 'Twas crafty to have openly patronized the fellow, to have treated his claim as a huge joke, to have recommended him to the Prince Regent. If necessary, he could fling him down and jump on him; for it stood to reason that he would not have ostentatiously taken him up unless he felt sure he was an impostor. Any one who knew Lord Osmington would see at a glance that the ordering of his ridiculously cut garments was a stroke of sarcastic humour, and that there was no collusion between the two. Sir Samuel Shepherd, when asked, admitted that the naughty jade, Miss Rowe, had charged my lord with collusion; but that he, Sir Samuel, had rebuked her. The world would, of course, follow the

lead of so distinguished a luminary. Yes, the waiting game was little trouble and the most effective. So soon as it became no longer possible to keep the phantom in the shade, he must be got rid of altogether, and the game carried on with a different pack of cards.

While musing confidently thus, Lord Osmington's confidential solicitor sent in to crave an interview. What could he want? What had happened?

His lordship laid too much stress, the solicitor was bound to say, upon the matter of the forgery. The case against Leoline might with advantage be stronger. The fact of his proposing to win his suit with manufactured documents was grave; but there might be difficulty in bringing home to him the crime. It was true that so far he had maintained an unbroken silence as to his culpability; but, in the opinion of Sir Samuel Shepherd, it was Miss Rowe, and not he, who was the guilty party. What! shrieked my lord. He had grudges against Miss Rowe on various counts, and would fain make her smart for officiousness; but just at present it was Leoline at whom it was desirable to throw stones. If Leoline could be proved a forger, it would cut his claws for ever, and render, by the same stroke, all future attempts of his little paladin on his behalf abortive. "Poor, deluded girl!" people would say. "What will not a silly thing do to please her sweetheart? She will step up and swear an alibi for him with a mouth in which butter would not melt,

regardless of her immortal soul and prospects of fire and brimstone."

"Do you presume to tell me that he'll get off?" Vere bawled, with a wicked glare. "He shan't get off! I won't have it."

To which the obsequious solicitor replied that influence might be brought to bear to postpone the criminal trial: technical points might be raised; lawyers might be made to chatter. What easier than to suggest that among the documents, which were in Sir Samuel's hands, were other forgeries, and that it would be convenient to obtain a postponement till the peerage case was decided? Yes; that would suit my lord very well; for he saw that here was another example wherein a waiting game would be the best. When in doubt, wait and watch. The affair required the lightest handling. Fortune favours the steady and persistent. All sorts of things might happen. The culprit might catch gaol fever, and succumb during the Long Vacation—a good riddance. So it came about that Abigel received a grievous and unexpected blow in the intelligence that the persecuted Leo was to remain in duress for several months longer; whereat she wept. But the secret council did not share her perturbation. Common sense was well developed in the Champion's pate, and he cogently remarked that if the sphynx-like Caleb could really unmask the Houndsditch people, and force them to

turn against my lord, Leoline would be saved by delay from actual punishment—because with the end of the Long Vacation must come the crisis.

This was admirably sage of Thomas, and his remark brought Caleb to his feet. He knew what he knew, he said, with his dark wink; but here was a point that occurred to him. In order to bring about the promised *dénouement*, it would be necessary to produce the Houndsditch people. As matters stood, what was to prevent their running away? The members of the conclave stared at each other aghast. Gentleman Jackson wagged his chin; Cribb scratched his head; Cy looked despondent. The phantoms must be watched, declared Caleb, and to that end he proposed that he or one of the party should go down to reconnoitre. Should he, Caleb, go?

Caleb went, and returned after a few hours, baffled and mystified. The fishmonger was gone—his shop, at least, was fast closed—but the tailor was still at home, superintending his serfs, as though everything were rosy, and he received his visitor with the same airy nonchalance as on the previous irruption. “My brother?” he said. “Oh, he’s gone away for change of air; his health was unstable, and the fish trade in this quarter doesn’t pay, unless it’s kosher.”

“Had he abandoned his intention of chatting in the Upper ‘Ouse?” asked Caleb, pleasantly.

“Oh dear, no. But he knew better than to trouble

the big-wigs till he was quite prepared, and would come up to the scratch at the end of the Long Vacation, smiling and sure to win."

But as he had important business to see to, he must attend to it, and bid adieu to the gossiping gentleman, who appeared to have so much time upon his hands. So Caleb came away, having learned nothing, except that one had escaped.

If the fishmonger chose to vanish, why should not the tailor do the like? He knew the probable date of the inquiry. Was he watching the course of events with intention of disappearing with a valise, and muddling matters somehow, so as to lead to more vexation?

The possibility of such a design must be frustrated. If Caleb would not be otherwise than sphynx-like, he must throw himself into the breach. A system of espionage would have to be inaugurated to prevent the bird from flitting. One hiding-place should be the same as another. Instead of remaining in concealment at Gentleman Jackson's, would Mr. Rann remove himself City-wards, take up his quarters in the tavern which overlooked the sartorial premises, and study the movements of the tailor?

Caleb Rann consented. It was a purgatorial exercise to him; but he endured it for a while with heroic perseverance, reporting himself occasionally at the Borough, to say that the snip was superintending

his men, as if there were nothing on his mind. Mr. Rann occupied a back bedroom, from which a fine prospect was obtainable of gutters and tiles, with a peep into the modest apartment wherein the person he was watching slept, so he had him well in view; but, as the snip did nothing unusual, time passed slowly for the watcher, and it is probable that he would have broken down in his virtuous intentions had he not found in his host a votary of the noble art. He gave boxing lessons to this worthy, duly instructed him in the Belcher jump, the Mendoza method of fast hitting, and found in him a promising pupil, who, in return, was liberal in the matter of free drinks and gossip about the affairs of the neighbourhood. But even these sports and pastimes palled at length upon the restless soul of Caleb, who became low and depressed, declaring sometimes that it was more lively in the Fleet, since there it was not necessary to remain in ambush and take exercise under cover of the night.

In suspense and weariness, suspicion of impending worries, did the vacation drag its length along; and our little knot of schemers did not enjoy their autumn, panting as they were compelled to be in the town oven, enduring storms of dust and stifling heat and the complaints of their bevy of witnesses.

At length the time was close at hand that all awaited with an anxiety which varied only in degree,

and the commander-in-chief stirred herself and her council from lethargy, and began to look to her guns. Betty Higgs, who long ago had grown dazed and oppressed by the bustle to which she was unused, were bidden to cheer up, for millennium and a cottage was within snatching distance, if she only could control her wits. Kimpton was informed that his services would soon be wanted, and that his forge fire must be permitted to go out; and when he donned his Sunday suit, and took the coach again at Ripon, the tenants turned out in a body to give him a parting cheer, and wish the cause God-speed. Nothing disastrous had occurred in the interval to assist the policy of the defence. Leoline had not caught gaol fever; none of the aged witnesses had expired; the commander-in-chief, looking to the buckles and accoutrements of her army, found all in place. So far as human prescience could see, there was literally nothing of importance betwixt her and the prize. Sir Samuel would return from his holiday in a few days in improved health and temper; icy suspicion would give place to cordiality; and in the merry ending the twists of the rack and the turns of the thumb-screw would be forgot; the sun would shine on the virtuous. The one point which needed special care and attention was with reference to the rival claimant. Was Caleb perfectly certain that the filmy person was tangible to the grasp—that he would not suddenly

pop off in a puff of smoke, leaving no wrack behind ? “What is to prevent his packing his valise, even at the last moment, and departing ?” persisted practical Cy. “We must tie him by the tail, by fair means or by violence ;” and, the conclave approving the suggestion, it was carried *nem. com.* that the phantom should be subpoenaed to bring him within reach of the law.

That modest bit of paper, with its guinea honorarium, produced more consternation on the visage of the Houndsditch candidate than would have resulted from a whole flight of another species of document—with which, by the way, he was more familiar—commencing with the preamble, “George, by the grace of God.” Watching him from his ambush, Caleb beheld his cheek grow white. The rigid fingers fluttered as they ran through his greasy locks. After its delivery, he stood under the sign emblazoned with the patronage of the nobility, and after glaring at it fiercely for a while, retired within, evidently uncertain how to act. That he, the rival claimant, should actually have been subpoenaed by the other side, and thereby be forced to put in an appearance, whether he liked it or not, had never entered within his range of possibilities, and Caleb could see him walking up and down with a perplexed brow and quivering lip. By-and-by, he put on his best coat and sallied forth. Was he going to retire without even a valise ? No. He bent his

steps towards Osmington House (whither Caleb stealthily followed), and evidently received bad news there; for, turning whiter still, he turned sharp round, nearly coming face to face with the spy who was watching his movements. What could the bad news be? With easy nonchalance, Caleb strolled to the well-known portals, and greeting the porter as an old acquaintance, asked who the queer covey was who seemed so twittery. "A rum covey, indeed!" returned the porter. "When I told him that my lord was still on the Continent, I thought he'd have a fit." "Not come home yet?" inquired Caleb, as he took his leave. Then the snip, afraid to await his patron's return, was going to make a bolt of it. With all haste Mr. Rann returned to his place of observation. At first, nothing; but as night approached a light became visible, moving to and fro in the upper chambers, and Caleb could trace the figure of the filmy one opening drawers and cupboards. Caleb, who watched from behind a shutter, became well-nigh as perplexed as his neighbour, and uncertain as to his course. When was he going to bolt, and in what direction? The watcher groaned in spirit, for now the knot of friends who had promised to stand by him in the future would revile the clumsy bungler, if he were to permit this valuable person to slip between his fingers. Single-handed he could do nothing—had not the slightest conception of what he ought to do. How

could he track in the dark so slippery a person ? What should he know of the law and its bewildering ins and outs ? What was the penalty for repudiating a subpœna—hanging at Tyburn, or beheading on Tower Hill ? Naught could be gained by staring out of window, and naught could be arranged by himself alone. It would be necessary to run a risk ; for a brief space to leave his post, and consult with his distant colleagues.

Mr. Cribb was closing the door of the Lion when the breathless messenger arrived, with the alarming intelligence that the filmy one was preparing to melt into space. Mr. Cribb was as unlearned in the law as Mr. Caleb Rann. Cy was within. Under the urgent circumstances, what did he propose ? The three pugilists retired into the back parlour, and Thomas produced pipes and glasses to give a jog to rusty intellects ; but the trio stared at one another, and awaited inspiration in vain while precious moments sped, with the forlorn aspect of the blind who would lead each other into the ditch.

It was two in the morning. There would be no use in awakening Miss Rowe, for she, sharp as she was, would prove as ignorant of technicalities as they. It was out of the question to beat up their own legal adviser ; for lawyers do not, like doctors, sport night bells, or bawl opinions in their night-caps out of window in the small hours. The legal mind would

require very violent refreshing indeed in the night to assist its curiously fluctuating memory. The trio must act according to their lights, and on their own responsibility, for better or for worse. The best thing to be done was to go down in a body to Houndsditch, and be guided by events. Such was the determination to which, influenced by grog and the best Virginia, they were impelled ; and it must be allowed that the advice of those silent monitors, who needed no refreshing, was as good as any other. Cautiously they approached the shop. There was nothing unusual about it. The shutters were closed, as they always were at night. How silly, after all ! For what else could they expect ? To find it wide open, or on fire ? With stealthy tread they sought Caleb's eyrie, and the publican, though surprised to receive company at such an hour, made them welcome ; for was it not an honour to receive under his roof the Champion of all England and the celebrated Sprig of Myrtle ? Upstairs they went, and, lighting no candle themselves, peered into the dark. Two attenuated grimalkins were making love in a gutter. In the apartment opposite there was no sign of life. What could it mean ? Was the filmy one already gone ? If he could not be found, would Sir Samuel grant another remand ? "Be guided by events," said the silent monitors. The next thing was to go to bed, and rise at dawn. Cyrus, agitated and uneasy, was unable to sleep ; crept out before the rest into the

deserted street. What was that white thing glimmering? A placard upon the shutter of the shop, which was not there when he last looked on it. "Closed for the present in consequence of domestic affliction." Then he was gone? How aggravating! Abigel would be in tears again, the tender bosom would heave with new trouble. Since they had been on the trail, the poor thing had become a fitful Niobe. Oh, for an end to this cycle of hopes and fears! Suspense would soon be past; that was a blessing. But would it? Now that the phantom had melted, was there not a possibility of more delay? It would not bear thinking of. With feverish impatience, Cyrus awaited an hour when he could go to his cousin and break the shocking news; meanwhile his dear friend must stop with Caleb on the look-out for anything fresh.

Abigel sent for her attorney, and from him gleaned no comfort. If a man deliberately repudiates his subpoena, he declared, you can issue a warrant and catch him if you can, but until the sin is committed you can do nothing. He may announce that he has gone away, but it does not follow that he will not return in time to put in an appearance. He must, therefore, "miss his appointment" before the law can come down on him; and this was the very thing that Abigel had schemed to prevent. No one had anything pleasant or feasible to counsel, and Cy was forced to endure glances of reproach in that he had not done

the impossible. Poor, long-suffering Cyrus ! Miss Rowe, in her attitude towards her future husband, was most unreasonable, making demands upon him which were preposterous. But, then, we must remember that it has always been the prerogative of brides-elect to be unreasonable. The most firm and strong-minded of men put up with their engaging tantrums, resolved when the knot is tied to retaliate with vigour. Cy meekly put up with his cousin's glances, but held his peace, which made her vastly angry. Of course he ought to have been sorrowful and sympathetic, but he was neither ; for he was cudgelling his brains with all his might, in hopes of unearthing an idea. By the time he got back to Houndsditch, the street was full of passengers hurrying to and fro ; but in the midst of the life and bustle, the blank front of that shop stood out conspicuous, like a tooth missing from a set. There it was, hermetically closed. The blinds of the windows above were drawn down ; the crowd of lively assistants was disbanded ; the sign creaked with grim irony, babbling of noble patronage.

Cy was not so silly as to show himself staring at the shop. He gazed at it furtively from behind a cart, and, slipping into the tavern, joined his friends. Nothing had transpired. But there was somebody still in the house ; that Mr. Cribb could swear, for he had detected a shadow on a wall which was not thrown by a rat or cat. He was sure that the tenement was not

deserted. What if the snip, unconscious of the eyrie, had thought to delude those who might be dogging him by ostensibly fleeing, but really remaining concealed? It would be clever. Perchance the phantom was as unlearned in the law as the bloodhounds had been, and wist not that nothing could be done against him until after the day of trial. Cy took courage, and, seizing the mawley of the Champion, begged to know whether he who had stood by him so often was still his friend. "How did he dare ask such a question?" grunted Mr. Cribb.

Caleb, too, vowed that he was ready for anything, and would with glee embrace any project which would break the terrible monotony of staring at nothing.

"Well, then," announced Mr. Smalley, who rose to the occasion, "we must go in for a thing that may be queer, but which after results must justify. We'll lie by all day, and in the evening make an excursion across that gutter. The date fixed by Sir Samuel is only four days off. If we find the fellow lurking there, we must pin him as your dog Jack, Tom, pinned the monkey. It may be quisby, but we can't help that. The landlord here need never know. We'll lock the fellow, if it turns out to be he, in a room in his own place, and take watching turn about. 'Tis the only way I see of bringing him up to the scratch."

Mr. Cribb didn't much like the idea, but Caleb

was charmed with its audacity ; and it was ultimately resolved to act upon it, despite the disapproval of the Champion. Night came, and Cribb had much ado to restrain the impetuosity of Caleb. There was certainly some one in the house, and if it really were the man, Caleb would be silent no longer. Curtains were drawn in all but the deserted bed-chamber, yet on the lower windows an attentive eye could detect now and again a gleam of radiance bisecting the centre in a white line. Caleb, like a hound in leash, was struggling against the collar. " You must stop behind, papa Cribb," he laughed, " for those rotten tiles will never support your weight. 'Twould have a fine effect if you came down on the enemy through the roof ; but you might hurt yourself, which would give 'em unnecessary pleasure. Leave squirrel-gambols to the young and active. Presently we will return with as many scalps as we can find ; meanwhile, ta-ta ! "

Mr. Rann was the first out on the ledge, and the woodwork under the tiles cracked ominously. The light was so uncertain, too, that it was difficult to hit on the least crazy places, and the venturesome fellow came near a broken neck for his trouble. But he got safe across, and smashing a pane with his elbow, shot the bolt, and, raising the sash, let himself into the bedchamber. Cyrus paused ere he followed, for in the stillness the breaking of the glass seemed like

the fall of an avalanche—or, perchance, 'twas only Mr. Smalley's nervousness which gave portentous volume to the sound. "Be very careful," Cribb whispered. "Crawl sideways on hands and knees to spread your weight. I will stay where I am, for I weigh sixteen stone." Cy obeyed, and the Champion breathed more freely when in turn he disappeared within the opening. "A pretty end," he grumbled, "for one so talented to perish like a night robber! That gal has ruined his prospects, and wants his life as well. The harpy! I wonder if she'll then be satisfied?"

While Mr. Cribb was wishing unchristian things with regard to Abigel, the two juniors were groping about with hands before them. Cy found the door, and, opening it, crept gently out on the landing to listen. There was more than one person in the house, for he could distinctly detect two voices whispering. How the staircase groaned as the interlopers stole down on tiptoe! At the bottom of the well a moving glimmer was visible, which, as they neared it, suddenly faded into darkness. This must be the ground floor, for both young men stumbled over rolls of cloth in the passages, and nearly flew headlong down the lowest flight. A few steps more—the kitchen. Through the uncurtained panes a dim radiance outlined the copper and the jack depending from the chimney-piece.

"You are here!" cried Cyrus. "I can smell the wick of the candle just extinguished. Come out at once, or 'twill be the worse for you!"

This exhortation was answered by a moan and then a sigh, as of a soul in pain breathing its woes through a keyhole.

"Be quick about it, my rorty rum 'uns," laughed Caleb. "If you don't light that dip before I can sneeze, I swear I'll pound you to a jelly."

Another voice sneered out of the gloom. "You infernal double-distilled jackass!" it hissed in wrath. "If you'd corked your snivelling they would never have known that any one was here. Whoever you are, there's little enough to steal. Whatever there is, is in the shop. My Bible oath, it's true. Take it and welcome, but leave us undisturbed."

"Generous person!" gibed Caleb. "Positively a premium to housebreakers. We want *you*, old pals, and not the shop; so light that glim you've doused, or else——"

He was striding towards the corner from whence came the moans, when there was a nimble scurrying as of many mice. A flash—and there the two brothers stood revealed; the one with a consumptive jauntiness, the other in terror unmistakable.

"By the ghost of Broughton, bagged 'em both!" shouted Caleb, in high delight, which Cyrus shared most cordially. "You offered your Bible oath just

now," he remarked waggishly; "that's just the very article we want. Four days hence, my friend, you'll have to give it, and after that you may hang yourselves as soon as ever you please."

The fishmonger appeared relieved. A Bible oath! Any number of Bible oaths. He would swear anything to oblige the good gentlemen.

"We want naught from you but silence," quoth the Sprig of Myrtle with contempt; upon which the grovelling rascal cringingly inquired if he might not go his ways. But it was soon made plain to him that he could not yet be allowed to escape.

"What we mean to do is this," bluff Mr. Smalley said, "and I don't care how soon you know it. Till dawn we stop here to enjoy your jovial society, then we shall choose two secure places where you will be separately locked up till wanted. My friend here and I will take it in turns to stay with you, and supply you with creature comforts. Whether it's a jolly time or not, rests with you. Anyhow it won't be long, so you'd best put a cheerful face on it."

The tailor was staggered. "What do you want of us?" he asked.

"I'll tell you what I want of you," cried Caleb. "I want you to up and tell Sir Samuel Shepherd all about your arrangements with Lord Osmington—of how he paid you to appear as a rival claimant and make bother."

"Never!" the snip replied, considering that for the present, at all events, it would be best to wear a bold exterior.

"Then I'm sorry," responded Mr. Rann, mimicking the other's drawl, "that I shall be forced to accuse you of fraud before that learned swell."

"Fraud! A claim may break down though put forward *bonâ fide*, and need not be fraud."

"In your case I fear there is no doubt of it. I warned you once, and you were too dense to take the hint."

"Oh," groaned the fishmonger, "indeed, my good kind gentleman——"

"I told you, I think, that your distinguished ancestor, who came to town as a lad without a penny, married his master's daughter; but I did not add that after the wedding he changed his name to please his father-in-law, calling himself by his wife's name of Jarvis—dropping his own name Smith."

The tailor moved not a muscle. "The old woman told you that, I suppose? It's the natur' of old women to tell lies."

"Foolish of 'em, ain't it?" gibed Caleb. "The 'prentice was married probably at St. Botolph's, the parish church, or one of the City places thereabouts, in his own name of Smith. It can easily be traced. Doesn't it strike you that when your ancestor only two generations back was called Smith, it's a bit

queer of you to claim the ancient earldom of the Jervoisess?"

The miserable snip threw up the sponge. "Be it as you wish," he murmured faintly.

"We will confess; oh yes, we will confess," put in the fishmonger with obsequious volubility. "My lord offered a taking bait to indigent folk like us—required us only to bring about delay——"

"And has deserted you, as his pleasant method is," returned Caleb.

Which of the two brothers appeared most despicable? The elder, chapfallen now and sulky, said, after a pause, with a persuasive whine, "'Tis cruel hard to earn bread and cheese. Would you ruin two poor men?"

"By no means," replied the affable Mr. Smalley. "Clear up your share of the business, and we won't prosecute."

Taking the key of the shop, Cy let himself out and knocked up the publican, that he might report without delay to expectant Thomas.

"That's a good job finished!" exclaimed the latter. "After this, I suppose, Miss Rowe will name the day?"

CHAPTER XII.

MORE PEBBLES.

WHEN the commander-in-chief galloped out again with her cohorts, this time to trounce the foe and stick him through the midriff once for all, she was quite certain that the point was gained—that, save as regarded formalities, the battle was won ; and with the conviction came an emptiness about the heart akin to sadness. What a void there would be—a black, far-stretching hollow cave within the little breast ! For several years she had schemed and puzzled her brains, and worried herself and others over the all-engrossing puzzle ; and now that the pieces were fitted together at last, she began to wonder what would happen to her when 'twas done and over.

Cy would take up his profession where he left it ; resume the bit, and amble round and round, learning new feats of skill under the trainer's whip ; and she, as in duty bound, would applaud and supply encouragement, and urge the courser to new effort. Ah

me ! 'twould be a dismal life ; but as it was so ordained she must obediently bow the head. Father Cribb, Cy's adopted papa, and therefore hers, was bent upon a meeting between the Sprig and that promising youth, Jack Randal. He did not expect to be gratified in his desire, because she, small but impenetrable obstacle, stood in the way. But he should be gratified, Miss Rowe determined. He was a good, kind man ; more true, more practically useful, than all the high-born fine-weather friends of more ambitious days. Who was she to set up her puny prejudices against the yearnings of that stout heart ? Did she not know, too, that his pupil was inwardly devoured by chagrin, in that by her caprice his career seemed ended at its outset ? Although by an effort of will he kept them quiet, Cy's sinews were quivering to have a trial of strength with Randal's. Yet the dear faithful fellow tried to conceal the fact from his beloved, and his submission rather annoyed her. It was not he, but Gentleman Jackson, who told her, with reproachful eyes, of how his Grace of Beaufort, meeting the Sprig in the street, had rated him for his listless air and idleness, and renewed his offer of patronage. Then she had said nothing, pretending not to understand, but had registered a secret vow that so soon as the grand quest was over she would have it out with Father Cribb, and show that she also could be generous.

Why will well-meaning friends advise us and interfere with words in our affairs, when they are not prepared to be of real service? The Princess Charlotte had been mightily glib in denouncing what she was pleased to consider as an ill-assorted marriage, declaring that she would do this, that, and the other; and what had she done to prevent it? Goodness gracious! When she arrived at this point in her train of thought, Abigel started violently, and glanced guiltily round the waiting-room at Sergeants' Inn, where she was sitting with her witnesses, and was relieved that Cy should be absent. What would he think, who was so straight and simple, if, delving into her breast, he should detect a trace of such fancies? Fie, for shame! She did not want the interference of Charlotte. On the contrary, Charlotte looked at the matter through darkened glasses, and failed to realize facts. What more preposterously absurd than to suggest that a match between two cousins could be a *mésalliance*? Rubbish and nonsense! Charlotte was a nice girl, but must mind her own business. Let it suffice her that her own lot had been cast as she desired. And what a lot! Fancy adoring a husband who was always saying "Douce-moment," checking your whims, curbing your freaks. Abigel would never have got on with a pedagogue spouse. She would have scratched his eyes out, spoilt his Byronic beauty, flung the ferule at his

head, and have rushed into the wilderness to exhale her grief and anger. Down at Claremont, the imperious maid was forced once or twice to bite her lip in order not to retort rudely when Manfred droned out his platitudes ; and on her way home had marvelled how Charlotte, erst so naughty and rebellious, could bend her white neck to the yoke, and apparently enjoy the process. Her own stubborn little brown neck should never wear a yoke, or her ruddy lips a bit. Charlotte's behaviour was really beneath contempt ; for had she not said, when papa tried to force her inclinations, that her husband, when she got one, should be *her first subject*, not her lord ? And here she was the slave of a handsome and poetic Corsair, watching his will like a dog, fawning on him for a caress ! Was so inconsistent a woman to presume to regulate the life of another ? Certainly not. If her friend Abigel thought fit to espouse her cousin she would espouse her cousin, and " all the king's horses and all the king's men " should not change her determination. Why should friends presume to twist our lives after the pattern of their own ? At this point Miss Rowe would rather have perished than give up her cousin ; and as she was so paradoxical and wayward, so unsettled as to what she wished, it was as well, perhaps, that her meditations should have been interrupted by the advent of Sir Samuel's clerk.

The Attorney-General was ready, he announced, to go into the vexed question of the claim, if the representatives of both parties were present. Mr. Leoline Jarvis was in his Majesty's temporary keeping, and could therefore not attend; but, doubtless, his counsel was there and witnesses.

"Of course his counsel was there, and witnesses," cried impetuous Abigel, jumping off her seat. "What a ridiculous question to ask!"

"That was all right," grinned the clerk. "Mr. Alexander Jarvis, of Houndsditch—he who entered a caveat—had he instructed his solicitor to appear? Mr. Alexander Jarvis had been most remiss, and Sir Samuel most long-suffering; but there were limits to the patience even of an Attorney-General——"

"Mr. Alexander Jarvis is here in person, and so is his brother," cried Cy, entering at this juncture; and behind him, in truth, came the City phantoms, guarded in the rear by Cribb and the Pink of Bow.

Abigel gave her cousin a bright look of thanks, and turned with curiosity to contemplate the bogies who had caused her so much disquiet. Washed out, rueful, laughable ghosts. Hollowed turnips, without even a light within. The fishmonger, pale and haggard, rubbed his palms together constantly, and performed a series of obsequious obeisances to the company, as if to apologize for presuming to exist.

The tailor, too, was humble, running his fingers through his hair with nervous gesture. What the pugilists had done to him during his three days' enforced occupancy of a cellar in his house, it becometh not this chronicler to say; but whatever it was, they had succeeded in breaking his spirit and reducing him to the condition of his brother.

"You've to make a clean breast of it, remember," Cy whispered to him, as the party were ushered into the presence. "Speak without fear of my lord Osmington. His day is over, thank Heaven!" and the other nodded with the obedience of a serf to the holder of the knout, and followed meekly at his heels.

He did speak out, and, as he proceeded with his tale, the brow of the Attorney-General grew darker, though, when he glanced now and then at Abigel, his expression became less frozen. What a base, bad fellow this lord must be! Wonders would never cease. He had, to suit his selfish purpose, actually bribed these persons—they confessed it—who by mere accident bore the name of Jarvis, to throw pebbles in the way of justice! So unscrupulous an individual was not one to stick at trifles. It was very likely that Miss Rowe's explanation was the true one, though he, Sir Samuel, had been loth to suspect a peer of mean devices. There was an end of the caveat, of course, and of the counter-claim; and it lay with the

opposite side to prosecute. Here the tailor quickly intervened. He had confessed on the strict understanding that the matter should end here. If they liked to bring him face to face with my lord, he was quite ready. Had he not done his best to remedy his fault? The young journeymen whom, seduced by false promises, he had engaged could speak to his lordship's visits, and so forth. The other side might do what they thought proper, but must refrain from seeking revenge. That was a clear understanding, and he held the opposition to their bargain.

With a wave of the hand, Sir Samuel bade him cease; and with a graceful inclination to Miss Rowe, inquired whether she would not like the pleasure of herself explaining the case. Her counsel was present, as he saw; but it was she who had worked up the evidence, and perchance——

Oh dear, yes, that she would! cried Abigel, with sparkling eyes. Who should know all about it as well as she, who had pored over the subject for—never mind how long, wrestling with its knots, painfully working at its tangles? Moreover, was not our dear heroine a *maitresse-femme*, who liked to have things her own way? So, in her pretty chip hat and pink silk pelisse and long white mittens to the elbows, she stood beside the table and declaimed, and won the admiration of all. Who might resist so fascinating a barrister? Not Sir Samuel Shepherd, or Mr.

Townshend, Windsor Herald, or Mr. Woods, Blue Mantle. As we have cause to know, her eyes could dart forth flames, her tongue be a two-edged sword ; but, on occasion, the dark orbs could be languishingly persuasive, the accents soft and silvern. And how well she told her story ! With what animation did she depict the half-crazy Lady Olivia on her death-bed ; Vere's father and Pentecost hovering on either side, promising all sorts of things ; and their deliberately setting to work before she was cold to obliterate awkward proofs. The plausible alterations in the church, and the removal of the tell-tale monument—its concealment and subsequent discovery. All present turned with interest to view the silent witness, as Mr. Kimpton removed the box-lid and wiped away the sawdust ; and Caleb looked shyly at Cyrus, who clapped him kindly on the shoulder. Each paper was examined with extremest care, but no flaw was to be detected. The torn edge of the certificate of Hans' birth found in the kettle-holder tallied exactly with one of the torn pages in the tattered register, and the woman from Crows' Liberties was able to swear that she herself had torn it. So was it with the slab. Betty Higgs, quite a Londoner now, and stout with unaccustomed good living, had been in the habit of dusting it, and would know it again among a thousand. The marriage lines of Hans and Naomi were proved correct by the country

parson, who produced the original document. Sir Samuel consulted with the heraldic bashaws, who examined the ivory box and seal, as if they expected them to explode; and when the three had wagged their chins and knocked their sapient heads together for a brief space, they sat down, each in his place, and wagged their chins again, and the Attorney-General spake.

He was satisfied, he said, that the claim of Leoline Jarvis, otherwise Jervois, was properly substantiated, and only regretted that evil machinations in high quarters should have postponed his verdict. Nothing could be clearer. Even if the Houndsditch claimant had not confessed, and so saved trouble, it would have devolved on him to show that his James Jarvis, of London, was identical with James Christopher, brother of Archibald. It was a characteristic circumstance that the forged document, about which there had been such a pother, should have been signed "James," instead of "James Christopher." But, fencing over, this technicality was fortunately avoided. The report of the Attorney-General to his Royal Highness George, Prince Regent, acting for and on behalf of his sacred Majesty, should be made out forthwith, and be transmitted to him through the Secretary of State for the Home Department. His Royal Highness would probably send it on to my lord chancellor, who would, no doubt, look at it, and send it back again;

and, after that, the Prince Regent would most likely sign a royal warrant, empowering his Chancellor to issue a writ of summons to the new peer, commanding his attendance in the House of Lords by the style, title, and dignity of Earl of Northallerton.

Miss Rowe's face fell. Probably—no doubt—most likely! Did Sir Samuel mean to imply that all was not over yet? That, if induced so to do, the Grand Signor might pop the report into his capacious dressing-gown pocket, and leave it there; that my lord chancellor might leave it on his table unlooked at till its characters were faded by time; that the Prince, on getting it back again, might forget to countersign and retransmit it to the legal pundit?

Sir Samuel dismissed the assembly, but, with a good-natured laugh, retained the disconcerted damsel. "I spoke as I did," he remarked drily, when they were alone, "because I deemed you acute enough to take a hint. This Lord Osmington, if his influence with the Prince yet exists—I'm told at one time it was great—may yet delay the writ of summons, as I stated. By some means or other, you must put such pressure on his Royal Highness as to induce him to command me to proceed. I would recommend you to see to it at once. Good morning."

"One word more!" implored Miss Rowe, by no means jubilant. "Mr. Jarvis is lying under this unjust accusation. How is he to be set free?"

" You may be sure," returned Sir Samuel, gravely, " that the evidence of those Houndsditch rascals will be embodied in my report; and Lord Osmington will have to be worked upon to make him withdraw the charge, or substantiate it without more postponement. Use your wits, and accept my congratulations. You are the most persevering young lady that I ever saw."

Abigel found herself somehow outside a closed door, and felt, as it slammed, as if the echoes were gibing at her concern. The tangles in this skein apparently had no end. Access to this particular coronet was defended by a Hydra, whose heads were Legion. What should she do? Use her wits, forsooth. All her resources were exhausted, her energies well-nigh spent. Human strength has its limits, and we cannot be expected to chop off heads for ever. Her bevy of witnesses gathered round, also the tailor and the fishmonger, and vied in the noisiness of their applause. Above all the din, Betty's shrill treble screeched; for she did not intend people to forget the share she had taken in the business. Abigel was glad to escape, with Kimpton and the pugilists, to consider the situation in quiet. She could not again present herself at the Pavilion. Lady Hertford would think her artful and designing, might even suppose her capable of trying to play Mrs. Masham to her Sarah duchess, and it would never do to risk so

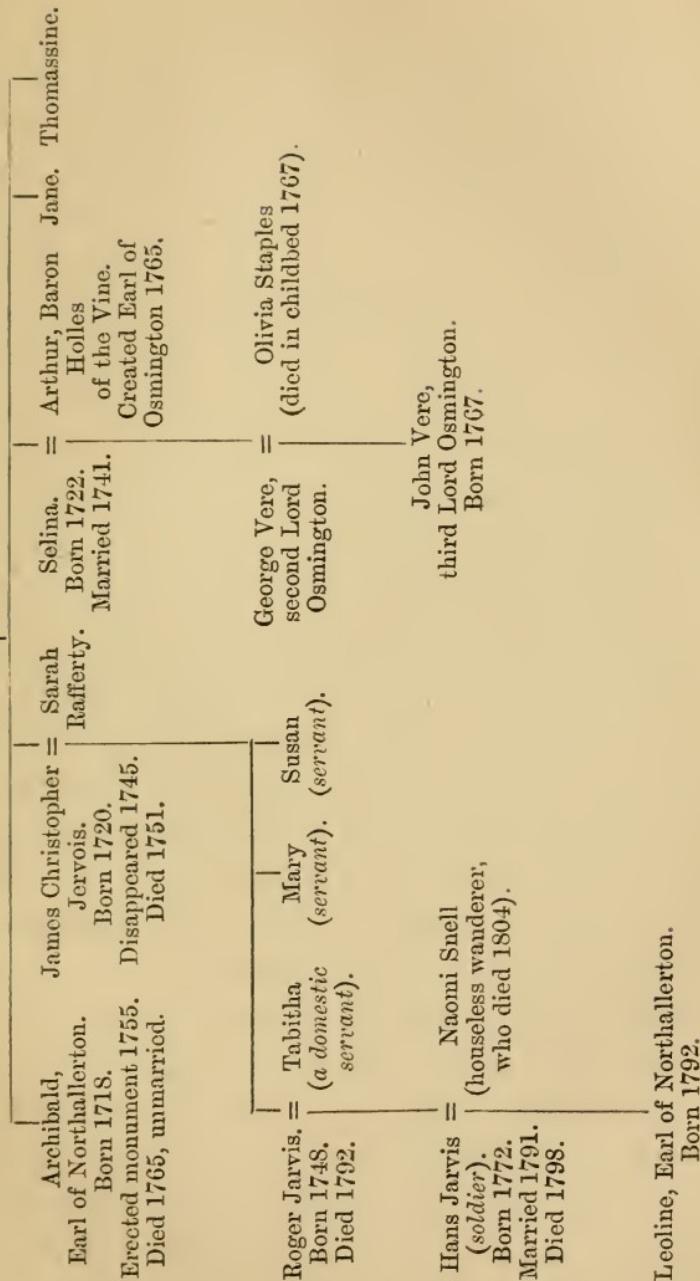
important an influence being cast into the wrong scale. The Prince, besides, might not be showing off a pair of trousers, and be amiable in consequence.

The Regent would have to be attacked ; but how was it to be done ?

"Through the Princess Charlotte," decided Cyrus. "There's no other way. She's in an interesting situation, and it's only natural she should wish to be friendly with her father. He drives down to see her at Claremont. Make it your business to be there when he arrives."

How her cousin's intellects were brightening ! The very thing. Abigel would go to tell her friend of her success ; but she would not allow her to remonstrate any more about her marriage. 'Twould be disloyal and improper. Charlotte must help for the last time. Would the pedagogue object ? Surely not, as things were. The pedigree was lucid and satisfying. He would be convinced by looking at it. So would anybody else. Here it is :—

Leoline, Earl of Northallerton.



CHAPTER XIII.

MY LORD MAKES UP HIS MIND.

So soon as he had succeeded in arranging the “waiting game” to his satisfaction, Lord Osmington went abroad, with the intention of amusing himself as much as possible, until summoned home by a note from Sir Samuel Shepherd. In an airy and devil-may-care fashion he had indited an epistle just on the eve of starting, in which he said that he relied on Mr. Attorney-General to let him know what passed with regard to the impostors ; and this being done, he dismissed the subject from his mind. But his foreign trip was not a success. Continental travel in a well-appointed britzka, drawn by fleet posters, is all very well if you have health and spirits to enjoy the varying panorama ; but if your nerves decline to be braced up, if your tongue is as dry as leather, your brain like a drum with the devil’s tattoo being constantly beaten on it, ’tis wiser to repose by your own fireside in a well-stuffed *fauteuil*. Vere went to Paris, and enjoyed the change as much as he was now capable of enjoy-

ing anything ; but when he endeavoured to get on as far as Homburg, to drink the waters, he found the way extremely long and the roads unaccountably stony, and it came on him with a gush of childish anger that he was surely drifting into that horrid condition called old age. Muchaquita, the new sultana *en titre*, was very troublesome, too ; for she saw no fun in being bounced about for hours in dust and heat, and made the days so unpleasing to my lord by reason of clamour and complaint, that he bundled her without ceremony into the coach behind with the servants, and was fain to travel in solitude. This was worse than all, for, having him at their mercy, goblins tweaked him, declining to be exorcised ; and he became so unhinged by perpetual nightmare, that he ordered the cavalcade to right-about face and return to the French capital, till it should please him to go back to England. Sitting thus alone, persons and events which it was his business to ignore crowded before his mental vision—dead Pentecost ; his crazy mother ; the objectionable Leoline, and the obnoxious Abigel. Vere found himself compelled to examine the situation instead of shelving it ; to consider what his next move should be. The affair had been put off and put off with admirable results so far, but it could not be postponed for ever. There was no present cause for anxiety, since one claimant was in duress, while the other was in his pay, and

had been well instructed as to what was expected of him. After much consideration, my lord determined to return to town at the end of autumn, and take steps to nip the nuisance in the bud before it expanded any further.

How was this to be done effectively—once for all and for ever? He would have to go to his royal master and friend, and conjure him, by past days and nights of jocund revelry, to help him in a strait. Unfortunately, the Prince had changed a good deal of late under influence of gout and the English Maintenon, professed ridiculous punctilio, and waning affection for Nym and Bardolph. But if an old crony were to ask a favour, he would not refuse—oh dear, no. And the particular favour in question was of a purely negative kind. Vere didn't want to borrow money, or anything offensive of that sort. He wanted his royal pal to assume the *rôle* of a wet blanket—that was all; and sure 'twas not much to ask. He had dropped Brummel like a hot potato, but that was his own fault. To poor, drunken Sherry, the Prince had been as kind as circumstances would permit: it was not within the bounds of human effort to set that broken Humpty-Dumpty on his shaky legs. He had been dirty and disreputable, but had never railed against the old love. Vere had never railed against the old love, and was not dirty; so there was no reason why the Regent should refuse a small favour. The more

he thought it over, the more convinced he became that he must speak as openly as he dared, and ask his Royal Highness not to encourage the enemy. Consistently reckless, he had made no inquiries since he went abroad as to whether any novel features had shown themselves in the peerage case. But now, journeying in solitude, he resolved that immediately on his return to England he would finally take the matter up; and having come to this grave determination, he folded his hands over his waistcoat, and sought refuge from thought in sleep.

It was late in autumn when the cavalcade—ladies, servants, cooks, musicians, what not—rattled into the courtyard of Osmington House, and my lord, weary and broken with jolting, betook himself forthwith to bed. It was far on in the afternoon of the following day when he rang his bell for the secretary, in order that that gentleman might give an account of all that had happened in his absence. Not a pleasant report. His arrival had spread like wildfire, and the waiting-rooms were crowded with clients, some fawning and servile, some noisy and menacing. My lord had awokened with an unusually bad headache, and was sick and nervous. “Don’t gabble rubbish!” he cried, as he strummed with pale, quivering fingers on a table. “Who are the vulgar idiots, and what do they want?”

There were people to whom he had made promises

before he went away, which promises had never been kept. There was Hamlet the jeweller, who refused to be put off with blandishments. There was Jameson the mantua-maker, with a tremendous bill. There was Harris the silversmith, from whom, in her friend's name, Juliana had cunningly taken up two thousand pounds' worth of gems, with which she had departed on a tour. Here, on this salver, were nineteen petitions ; on this one, twenty applications for subscriptions due to clubs ; ever so many more from establishments and institutions for the promotion of horse-racing and the noble art of self-defence. "Curse the noble art!" roared my lord, with malignant ferocity. How was the household ?

Very so-so. As the secretary had had the honour to observe, Juliana, like the raven, had left the Ark never to return. Josephine and Susanne were ill from eating bonbons, with two doctors in constant attendance. Zamora, the Spanish vixen, had pretended to commit suicide from jealousy at being left at home, and, more successful than she meant to be, was *in extremis*. Augustine, in spite of all Fig the coachman's efforts, had insisted on driving my lord's favourite horse in a curricle, and had broken its knees. The said coachman had then flown at mademoiselle's French serving-man, and there had been bloodshed and battery—

"Enough ! enough !" roared Vere, with growing

wrath. The Continent had proved unbearable ; home was intolerable.

"Ah, by-the-by," resumed the secretary, "there's a Signor Pecci, who has writ an heroic opera, in which, for a consideration, your lordship is to figure as hero ; a Portuguese girl with some fine antiques for inspection ; and a decayed gentleman with arms and armour, which he insists that your lordship shall buy."

"Curse his impudence !" roared my lord again. "What of the treasury ? Has the agent——"

"That's the worst," declared the secretary. "He wrote last week that, in consequence of the Attorney-General's report, the Yorkshire tenants have unanimously refused to pay their rent, since, the dormant peerage being revived, the property will also be claimed."

"What ?" shrieked Lord Osmington, with a ghastly face. "The Attorney-General has——"

"Quick ! " the frightened secretary cried. "His lordship is taken ill. Some water—quick ! Indeed, I thought he knew it, or would have broken the news more gently."

Vere fell back in his chair, his face drawn up by spasms, his brow dank and wrinkled, and snored heavily. Was he stricken with paralysis ? No. After being bled, he slowly recovered, and lay staring out of window at the sunny street till dusk, without uttering a sound. Yonder hackney coachman

was to be envied, though his hat was rimless, his coat in tatters. To judge by his jovial, weatherworn visage, he was not haunted by the past. He had no sycophants to pester him, no debts to harass him, no establishment to eat him up alive, no enemies to track him down and ruin him. The Attorney-General had not kept his word—had not informed his lordship of his proceedings. Had the case, then, been tried in his absence? What had transpired? How much had come out? The dormant peerage revived! It was extinct—dead as a door-nail! Vere gnashed his teeth, and swore that nothing was ever more defunct; and then the tears coursed down his face, and he was deeply grieved for himself. If the Attorney-General had reported favourably, these people must have found something of whose existence he, Vere, was ignorant. How cruel of his father and of Pentecost to tell him that everything was safe, when it was not! They had with their assurances lulled him into a false security; otherwise he would have been vigilant, so very vigilant, and step by step have defeated them. Oh, it was selfish of his father to make things secure for his own life, and then go down into the family vault without caring what happened to his son! As for Pentecost, she was a puling, drinking, drivelling hag—a wicked witch! And Vere, as he ground his teeth, poured forth anathema with moist, weak lips upon his foster-mother's name. Night came on—a terrible, awful

night, full of whirling memories that spun round his head like bats; vampires, armed each with a hot point to burn his flesh, sharp teeth to bite, a harsh voice to yell and rave. Such a night Vere had never spent in all his life, and shuddering, he vowed never to pass such another. Purgatory, with all its terrors of flame and demon, could not be more unendurable. Feverish and really ill, he rung his bell betimes, summoned the valet and the barber, and snapped at them for their ponderous sloth. What had transpired? If he only knew! Imagination and uncertainty, perchance, were making a mountain of a molehill; fear was constructing a bugaboo to terrify him withal. How should he find out quietly what had transpired, in order to trim his sails in accordance with events? Ashamed of the display of weakness of which the secretary had been witness, he would not again receive that personage. Ordering a plain chariot, he crept up its steps, an enfeebled invalid, and directed the driver to Houndsditch. So! both shops shut; the owners gone away on account of domestic affliction. That was all right. They had fled at the proper moment, as was intended. They would want money, which my lord knew not how to raise. How provoking of the Attorney-General not to give him notice of the date of his investigation! What was his own solicitor about? True, while he was abroad, letters might have pursued in vain. What a fool he had been not to watch,

knowing, as he might have known, that the infernal, ungrateful jade was energy incarnate ! However, the tailor had made good his retreat ; that was a comfort. Should he call on Sir Samuel Shepherd, and airily demand particulars ? No. His nerves were too shaky ; the shock had been too severe. He would go to Carlton House, and see if his old friend was there.

His Royal Highness was not at home. Vere glanced with suspicion at the servants, for Brummel and Sherry had in turn been informed that his Royal Highness was not at home, though through a window they could catch a glimpse of the familiar jasey. He was in town, for the Royal Standard was waving overhead. Was he at home to others, but not to him ? His Royal Highness was gone to Claremont, a footman explained ; had expressed his intention of dining with the Princess Charlotte and Prince Leopold, and returning in the evening. Gone to Claremont ! The last place where Vere would have thought of running him to earth. Though little inclined to merriment, he burst into a laugh, and as his eye wandered in the direction of Warwick House, close by, scene of so many broils, the footman perceived his meaning and smiled. Insolent varlet ! how dared he presume to grin at my lord Osmington ? Things were coming to a pretty pass. Dash, dash, dash ! would the coachman be good enough to drive home like fury, and order out the brand-new coach ? My lord would drive

to Claremont, and pay his humble respects to his much-loved friend and master.

If a bombshell had dropped into the central flower-bed of the quiet Claremont garden, it would not have created more surprise and dismay than the unexpected irruption of my lord Osmington, cadaverous and wan. A young man who prowled in the shrubbery, upon perceiving the equipage, dashed across the lawn into the mansion, and, regardless of ceremony and etiquette, proclaimed the amazing news. Bluebeard, when calmly dining and expecting the head of Fatima as a table ornament, was not more startled when a watchman on the castle keep echoed the sentiment of sister Anne, and announced that "somebody was coming."

Miss Rowe, who sat on the floor beside the couch upon which the Princess reclined, turned red and white, and looked instinctively to her cousin for advice. Charlotte started. Manfred was too staid to be astonished by anything. The Prince of Wales looked furious, and muttered under his breath, "Was ever such assurance!" 'Twas a pity that a bombshell should fall in the midst of so sweet a group; disturb the harmony of so pretty a dovecote. Her father was so amiable and captivating that Charlotte forgot her habitual dread, and began to realize that she had judged him harshly, and had acted like a naughty girl. But though she was glad to see him

under genial and favourable auspices, which if continued would induce the growth of love, she could not blame herself for having cloven to her mother. That *trouble-fête* being disposed of (she was at this moment squalling duets at Parma with Marie Louise, ex-Empress), factious jealousy was at an end. And into the midst of the entrancing tableau of mutual affection and trust plunged the inopportune Vere, like a bull into a china-shop. Was he likely to gain his object? When he entered the drawing-room something told him "No." The atmosphere was unsuitable—there were inimical germs hovering; he wished, too late, that he had not come. The first impulse of the Regent had been to deny him admittance; but the pedagogue, who showed signs of wielding his ferule even over the august jasey, decided otherwise. "Better see him now in an informal way," he whispered. "Treat him coldly, and he'll take a hint." Such counsel jumped with the lazy inclinations of the Grand Signor, who hated scenes; so he held out two gouty fingers, and hoped his lordship was well. His lordship was enchanted to behold his Prince so stout and hearty, and his Princess the embodiment of happiness. Might they ever, etc., etc.—with his hand upon his bosom—was his constant and fervent prayer. And, bless his heart! either his sight deceived him—and 'twas not as good as it was—or here was Miss Rowe, who in happier days used to

share his home—the dear Euphrosyne—and to make his tea? His Royal Highness would not believe it, though none understood the sex as well as he, but this lovely maiden—dem it, lovelier than ever—was a Machiavel in petticoats. For all her simple air, she was fit to be Prime Minister, demme if she wasn't. He had been unlucky enough to incur her dislike, but he bore no malice—not he, and was ready this very minute to shake hands and take her home again, and let bygones be bygones. What trifles affect our lives! The remark was trite, he knew, but could not help making it for all that. If she hadn't taken it into her dear darling little noddle to go to a certain *ridotto*, certain silly speeches would not have been made, and certain quick-tempered damsels would not have been huffy, and all would have been right. The damsel would have been my lady Osmington by this time, for he always intended to propose so soon as he had summoned courage.

“If Adam hadn't eaten an apple, he would be still in Eden,” quoth Miss Rowe from her seat on the carpet. She loathed humbug, and to see Vere grimacing and capering like a posture-master raised her gorge. His one virtue used to be a downright bluff contempt for public opinion. It was horrible to see him, unnerved and driven mad by intangible terrors, playing the servile sycophant.

The Prince of Wales was as shocked as she at the

change, and was specially disgusted at perceiving the ugly brand on the brow of the last of the cronies. He had made even a more elaborate toilette than usual ; but it was there, nevertheless, not to be concealed, and his master shrank at sight of it. One after another, all had succumbed to dissipation except this one. On his waxen skin, his bloodshot eye, his moist lip, his twitching muscles, might be traced the fatal mark. Was he, the head, also to succumb in turn ? Now that the *bête noire* was gone, life was not unpleasant. Is it to be always so ? Are we to toil and struggle, and fight and suffer, in order to win the cup ; and when we seem to clutch it, is it always to be dashed from our lips ? What a mockery, then, this life of illusions, of hopes that may never be gratified, of desires that may never be fulfilled ! The Prince of Wales was firmly resolved that he, at least, would be an exception to the rule. Gouty he was, with no digestion to boast of, but a fine man still. Like Candide, he was cultivating his garden, and was beginning to feel a new sensation of quiet bliss as he sat in the grounds of the Pavilion and designed his weird adornments. Sherry had by his aspect given him turns, and, therefore, though he loved him, he could consent to look on him no more. He had never loved Vere as he loved Sheridan ; and after what had come out about my lord, he would be compelled to drop him.

Lord Osmington was soon extremely sorry that he had not remained at home. Perceiving that the civil speeches which issued so oddly from his lips were not appreciated, he began to dread lest something awful should have transpired in his absence, and begged the Regent if he might ask for a few moments in private. "Lady Hertford would be glad, I know, if she were here——" he was beginning, when the Prince cut him short.

"I think that anything you have to say," observed his Royal Highness, "may be said before the present company. Those Houndsditch rascals have confessed, so I would recommend them to the good offices of your lordship. You will, of course, withdraw the charge against my lord Northallerton ?"

Vere felt cold from top to toe, but, stringing up his nerves with a supreme effort of will, remained outwardly composed. "The Houndsditch rascals ! Egad, those Jarvises were comical blades ! "

"Their name is Smith," remarked the Regent, with meaning.

"Smith !" ejaculated my lord, in real surprise. "I swear on my honour that I never knew that."

The two ladies smiled, for they did not believe my lord ; while the Regent's brow grew black as thunder. Lord Osmington proceeded to explain. His Royal Highness must excuse ignorance, but having just returned from abroad, he knew nothing. My lord

Northallerton ! The Prince was satisfied, then, as to the justice of his pretensions ? Who would have thought it ? Having paid his humble respects, he would retire. So the dreamy young man was to sit in the House of Lords ! How glad his patroness, the Princess of Wales, would be ! Why, for her 'twould be quite a triumph ! With that parting stab Lord Osmington made a bow, and with quite a jaunty step got into the brand-new coach.

"Curse him !" the Prince muttered, as the carriage rolled away, "that is the one source of regret I have in the matter. It will please Caroline ! "

And the fair girl lying on the sofa stretched forth her hand and whispered, "Hush, hush ! You promised to be just. If contrary to private inclination, 'twill look the more disinterested and noble."

Lord Osmington reflected as he drove back to town. His eye was brighter than it had been for many a day, and a cynical smirk played about his lips. "Aha ! I had him there," he muttered. "Hope he liked it. To think that they are Smiths ! I never cared to ask. He throws me over in my hour of need. If I'd served my God as I have served my king, and all that, as Sherry said. I might have known, though, that he would do the bidding of a wench. Well, it's over, it seems—quite over. That's better than dragging on when a thing's hopeless. An absurd place, the world ; not worth living in after

five and twenty, when illusions vanish. The sport of passions, man's led blindfold where they please, and they, having involved him in difficulties, leave him to extricate himself as he may."

My lord stepped out of the coach so blithely that the household, who knew whither he had gone, and were peeping through chinks and keyholes with as many eyes as a peacock's tail, thought he must have been successful in his suit. Mr. Hamlet's man, who had turned up with evil intentions, put his paper back in his pocket, and, with a profound obeisance, asked if there were any orders. The secretary skipped down the stairs ; and Muchaquita, who had been packing up, flew from behind a *portière* into the arms of her dear love, vowing that he looked quite juvenile. Was all well ? Would he take her at once to Richmond, as she wanted some fresh air ? " Not to-day," he said, with a loud laugh. " All is well, quite well ; couldn't be better. We'll have dinner at seven—a dinner of congratulation and affection ; the whole menagerie." Dash, dash ! Monsieur Eude's best viands ; and the pretty dears would be obliging enough for once to refrain from open abuse. How delightful ! All clapped their hands and pulled out their best gowns and rouge-pots and cosmetics, and set themselves to decorate like Jezebels in honour of the festive occasion. How prudent Susanne had been, proclaimed that sylph, to advise the menagerie to wait before taking

to flight. *Ce pauvre milord* had been a prey to care for ever so long, but now *ce bon Prince* had set his mind at rest. There was a divine suite of emeralds at the corner of Cranbourn Alley. Before the night was out she would wheedle them out of my lord. Augustine considered that it would be wise to secure what they had before laying themselves out for more. All her things were safe at an hotel. And many that were not hers, too, scoffed Cornelie. And so the darlings went on in their usual delectable manner till it was time to descend to the drawing-room, and there even they, accustomed as they were to luxury, were taken aback by the unusual splendour. Illuminated *a giorno* with wax candles, how handsome the saloon appeared with its choice nicknacks, china, bronzes! And in the middle of the gorgeous carpet stood my lord—he was always a whimsical fellow, so full of quaint *esprit*—clad in a simple military frock.

“How ugly!” cried Augustine, with a little scream; “and he has such beautiful clothes!”

“Ugly enough,” responded the smiling host. “It is the uniform I wore when I was a soldier—in early life, when I believed in innocence and human goodness—and it amuses me to put it on in your presence, and try and recall those preposterous fancies. But come, ladies, I am not very well or strong; yet something has happened to-day which makes me ardently desire to drink your health.”

"Something very, very delightful?" whispered Cornelie. "I am so glad!"

"Very delightful indeed," acquiesced my lord. "A good dinner, some good wine, your charming society for a little while, and then, if you'll excuse an invalid, I'll go to rest."

After a good dinner and good wine of course he would be excused, all replied in chorus. Such precious health must be fondly cared for—bolstered, coddled. They would one and all put him to bed and tuck him up, and tie on his blessed nightcap—that they would; and if ever blessings produced sleep, his should be profound. He hoped it would, he observed, smiling. They were very kind, but he would dispense with the ceremony of nightcap-tying, and consider it as done. Dinner was waiting, and Monsieur Eude—late of Crockford's—allowed no dallying. He was as much outraged if his *plats* were kept waiting, as if the guests were to put salt in their soup. Once an ignorant person had so far transgressed, and Monsieur Eude would have given warning if the peccant one had not apologized. The houris did not quarrel much at dinner. Each seemed to vie with the other in sweetness, and their tempers became the more angelic on account of their host's lavish promises. They were to have new bracelets, rings, gowns, tippets—anything; but they must say good-bye for the present, as my lord was going to rest.

He went into his bedchamber, and sauntered up and down, the same peculiar smile playing around his mouth ; and as he walked, chuckled, now and again repeating, “ Osmington a pauper ! ” He bade his valet prepare a warm bath with perfumes, and retire, and not to come in next day till he was summoned. Divesting himself of his plain frock, he gazed wistfully on it for a while and sighed, and then softly laughing, tickled by some conceit, began to unharness himself of the numerous chains and *breloques* and lockets, filled with divers-coloured hair, with which he was usually enwrapped. One miniature he took from round his neck, and crushed it under his heel. “ The silly creature,” he muttered with pity. “ The only one who was ever faithful ; and much good came of it ! ” By this time the water was ready, clear and sparkling, in the white marble bath. Warm towels were ranged about a tiny stove ; sponges, brushes, perfumes, close at hand. How cosy and comfortable it all looked under the mellow glimmer of a shaded lamp ! The valet bowed low, and his master stood listening to his departing footsteps as they echoed faintly away in the long corridor. So cosy, so comfortable, so quiet. No fear of interruption or annoyance in this snug retreat ! With the morning would come the clamorous clients, the rude and noisy tradespeople, perhaps a bailiff or two to add seasoning to the salad. “ Osmington a pauper ! ” repeated my lord, amused

by the conceit. "What will they say of me to-morrow ? A pack of nonsense. Who may judge whether the motive which induces a man to leave the world is adequate ? The sensations of different persons may not be gauged by the same standard. An event that touches one but slightly, drives another to insanity. How inconsistent people are in their judgments ! Military leaders think nothing of killing off a thousand or so in battle to aid a cause which concerns them not. Yet what an outcry if an individual shows that he agrees that life is valueless by deliberately resigning it ! Poor Brinsley !" Vere mused, with a passing sadness. "What an end was his ; and what an existence at this moment is Brummel's ! Sheridan lacked the courage ; yet sure he suffered infinitely more than can come of one second's agony ? It is all over ; and, upon my word, it has been so little pleasant on the whole, that I cannot say I'm sorry."

The following afternoon there arose a terrible outcry in the palace of the Osmingtons. Scared servants were running hither and thither aimlessly. The houris were heaped together in inconsolable groups, weeping tears of abortive greed. The valet, after patiently waiting, had entered the bathroom ; and there, with his head upon the marble, lay the Earl of Osmington, in a profound sleep. There was a hole behind the ear from which the black blood oozed, and a pistol lay by his hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

YORKSHIRE AGAIN.

THE excitement in the metropolis, when the news spread, was tremendous, for Lord Osmington had, for years and years, been a conspicuous figure in the fashionable world ; courted on account of his princely prodigality ; admired for his consistent indifference to all laws, human and divine. He was a rum 'un, the mob were wont to say ; but he was a game 'un, and the way he would drive over an old woman and take no notice of her screaming was thoroughly artistic. So soon as they recovered from the shock, there was a stampede among the houris. The gates of the Ark were open wide, and through them there poured a curious medley—a string of birds and beasts, each after its kind, who stood not upon the order of their going, but went, laden with as much as could be carried. By nightfall the place was silent, and the exodus complete—no living thing moved in the empty house save the hired workers, who busied themselves about the bed where lay the

smiling corpse. What a change! What strange advertisements appeared in the papers! A Spanish countess, an interesting widow, desired a place as companion. A French lady, brought up in the first style of elegance, wished to enter an orderly family. A foreign gentleman of cheerful disposition and refined taste wished to be attached to a nobleman of opulence; he had been in the habit of reading the newspapers, answering invitations, and selecting snuff-boxes. An engaging young Italian, who could speak six languages, found himself unemployed; he was familiar with every quarter of the town, had genteel manners and address, and was remarkable for secrecy and fidelity. But why go through the list? We have done with the unsavoury company. The demireps fled from the scene of suicide; the place of dancers, limpets, mushrooms, *pique-assiettes*, knew them no more. The maids of the neighbouring mansions had nothing henceforth to look at through the gratings of the area; for Fig, the head groom, was gone with the horses, and John, the coachman, had carried off the coaches; the plate had disappeared by magic, and my lord's own manservant had humbly gleaned after the reapers.

For several days after the catastrophe, the Prince of Wales was pensive and subdued. The last of the set was gone—the last of the flaring circle of lights was extinguished with a foul stench—and my lady Hertford, with an effort, held her peace, for the occa-

sion required no homily. When he announced that he intended to honour the new lord with a visit, she nodded approval. Nothing could be more prudent or in more graceful taste. The romance which hung over his story turned the eyes of all London in the direction of Lord Northallerton. To take up the whilom *protégé* of Caroline would look generous in the Regent. It would be a fine opportunity for flowery platitudes about a “steady and uncompromising zeal for the furtherance of truth and justice;” and the world would be led to see that although his Royal Highness had once been a friend of the deceased, he was ignorant of his wicked tricks, and sorry for their partial success. The Corsair was pleased at the turn events had taken, and Charlotte took no pains to conceal her joy. That Lord Osmington, finding his position impossible, should have elected to carve a way out of it, was fortunate for those who had caught him in their toils. The prosecutor having departed this life, the question of the forged letter need not be gone into, nor the other question of the estates which he had done his best to squander. Those estates had passed to Selina, because James Christopher had survived his son, or was supposed to have done so. The contrary being proved, and a direct male heir found, the prize would have to be disgorged after more or less quibbling and litigation. It was well that Vere should have cheated the lawyers of their spoil by retiring from the

contest. Charlotte embraced her dear friend with gushing affection, and whispered rapturous nonsense in her ear ; but the latter was grown suddenly grave and still ; oppressed, as it appeared, by the emptiness which follows a task achieved, and appalled by what she saw in front.

" It's nice of my father to go to the junketing," prattled the Princess. " I wish years agone I'd known him as well as I do now. And it's horridly tiresome that I can't go, too. I'm sure I might, but Leopold won't let me. You should have seen his face when it was proposed. Do you know, I'd have pulled his hair, if I had dared, for looking so priggish. But you will be there, the heroine of the day, to do the honours and receive the congratulations. What ! not go ? A pretty thing for them all to be prancing and dancing, and the originator of the festival absent ! "

" My work is done," Abigel said uneasily. " There's nothing to call me to Yorkshire any more. Indeed, indeed, I would rather stay in town, where my new place will be—my new life commence."

" Toujours le beau cousin ! " laughed Charlotte ; while Manfred looked up and whispered, " Doucement." " Where is it to be, my dear ? Nay, I must know, since 'tis my bounden duty to rise and forbid the banns. ' If anyone know cause or just impediment——' Yes, Mr. Parson, please ; I know many just causes and impediments ; and, what is more, it shall never be.

I tell you, Abby, it shall not; so we won't discuss the question."

When the Princess spoke thus, Abigel looked much concerned. It was dreadful that all who professed to love her should set their faces against the inevitable. Causes and impediments—what were they? She could not see any. Leoline was about to take his place among his peers, his proper place, which she felt sure he would adorn. Cy, the good, the true, the honest, ay, the ingenious and astute, had done her bidding, and more than her bidding, and fairly won his guerdon. Jacob never toiled for Rachel as Cy had done for her. When she looked back at his behaviour, its honesty and uprightness and sacrifice of dearest aspirations, she was frightened in that he should love her so. This great absorbing love was a gift which she accepted with awe and tremor, as something of which she was unworthy. But she would try to be worthy of it; oh yes, she would try hard, and pray that he might never regret the gift. What if she should be mistaken as to her strength—be unable to make him happy in exchange for all he had done? That was not likely, for he was simple and easily pleased. What about these Yorkshire festivities? Must she really travel again over that familiar road, and revisit Battle Magna? Perhaps her absence, all things considered, would look odd, and she did not wish to be food for idle gossip. If

she must go, she must. Cy was going, so were Cribb and Caleb Rann. At Battle Magna she would make a point of speaking to Cribb, and of arranging the future of his boy.

It came to pass that the Yorkshire road was alive with vehicles ; for his Royal Highness the Prince Regent was going north, and so was a goodly company. The Princess Charlotte was expecting her confinement, otherwise she would have accompanied her father. Before starting he paid her a long visit, deeply gratifying to both ; and she exacted a promise before he left which seemed to relieve her mind. Leoline, upon his release, was taken possession of by my lord Yarmouth, who, in obedience to orders from his far-sighted mother, made much of the poetic youth, swore that his sonnets were perfection, and strolled arm-in-arm on the “Grand Strut” with him, or lounged in Fops’ Alley by his side. Since his Royal Highness descended to undertake a wearisome journey to do him honour, Lord Northallerton must see that a proper reception was provided. Should his new ally go with him to his new possessions, help to set things in order, put this and that in fitting train ? It would be most kind, if not too troublesome. Trouble ! what was trouble ? Lord Yarmouth had often been associated with the suicide, and would be glad of the opportunity of showing that he regretted the contamination. He would take arrangements on himself,

and the new peer might rest easy, certain that all would be right. My lady Hertford desired a visit ere he left, and would take no denial. Never was anything half so romantic and delightful. He must look on Hertford House as a home, on her as a second mother. By-and-by she would provide him with a noble wife, and then the picture would be complete.

Leoline was dazed by the turn of the wheel and the felicitations that poured in on him, and was glad enough to escape ; but before he turned from the metropolis he sought an interview with Abigel—in vain. She who had been so frank and outspoken avoided him now, fled at his approach like a startled doe. What did she mean by it ? Never mind ; she promised to be present at Battle Magna on the occasion of his solemn entry, and she should not escape him there. And what a scene it was ! The Unicorn nearly tumbled off his perch over the gateway when it became known that the Regent himself was coming to sleep at Ripon. The local bands furbished their instruments to give him a noisy if not harmonious reception. Marrow-bones and cleavers became much in demand. Bunting arrived from York to deck the thoroughfares. All the neighbouring gardens were shorn of their fairest bloom. The mayor got out his furred gown ; the bugler the silver horn, which on grand occasions performs sweet symphonies in the centre of the market-

place. Every one was to dine at the expense of the new earl. Farmers in expectation of a lowering of rents were boisterously gay, their wives and daughters stark staring mad ; for was there not to be a ball in an immense marquee, and was not the first gentleman in Europe to foot it in the mazy dance ? As for Betty Higgs, she was beside herself. Abigel had the forethought to send her a new cap direct from the metropolis, wherewith Madam Sally Scraggs was promptly and utterly annihilated. Certainly the *misc en scène* did credit to Red Herrings. His Royal Highness in a splendid barouche, with the new peer by his side, was dragged bowing and bending by a screaming crowd from Ripon to Stratton-on-the-Fosse, where there were speeches and addresses ; then on through the park to the venerable pile, which had hastily been set in order. It is all very fine to scoff at popularity when you are unpopular, but to be cheered is vastly pleasant. Affairs had been so gloomy for a long while past that the Regent was as used to being hooted as in the grim days of the Dreadful Woman. The minds of men were bent with more acerbity than usual upon a redress of grievances, and some, made bold by calamity and despair, spoke out in unvarnished language. The result was a series of prosecutions, conducted under the auspices of Lords Liverpool and Sidmouth, which exasperated the people yet further. They were crushed by debt, they said, numbed by

taxation which had no longer for an excuse a monopoly of commerce. The theory and practice of the constitution were at variance, and, unable to procure parliamentary reform, they ran after the Regent and yelled at him. How different in Yorkshire ! Lovely ladies flung roses on his wig, pelted him with chrysanthemums. If cantankerous London would only learn a lesson in loyalty ! For two pins the Grand Signor declared he would move his Court and come and reign at Ripon—build teapots and pagodas there. The ceremonies of the first day were touching, genuinely conducive to tears. The programme for the second would be more affecting still ; for the noble company were to be conducted to the celebrated battle-field where, in 1300, the original Leoline had protected the Standard with his body, and the mayor was to orate with wisdom. “ Long live Plantagenet ! long live the royal blood ! ” had been shouted to-day with stentorian lungs, and would be shrieked still louder to-morrow. It was charming to see that the *vieille souche* was appreciated in some localities. The evening of the first day was to be passed in peace over a quiet dinner, in order that strength might be acquired for subsequent orgies. Red Herrings, who knew what he was about, had rescued the cook out of the *débris* of the Osmington smash, and brought him in his train. The great man had prepared a *dîner de repos*, a superlative idyllic repast,

and having served it to perfection, set himself to think out the ball supper, which was to be executed by an army of *marmitons*.

It was the first week in November, and warm for the time of year. Battle Magna looked its best, clad in its autumn garb ; for the turf of the pleasaunce, though neglected, was vivid as an emerald, the yews and pines sombrely rich, while the amphitheatre behind was of every ruddy hue, from palest gold to orange, from ruby to russet brown. The wild currant bushes that fringed the stream were heavy with scarlet berries ; leaves floated by, mottled with crimson, stained with purple. The pale ruins of the Cistercian abbey seemed more gaunt and hoar from contrast with the wealth of colour. It was like this that Abigel had learned to love the spot, wrapped in its many-coloured mantle, and, dinner over, she stole out into the gloaming to revive a train of memories for the last time. The gentlemen were busy with their wine, and would be so till midnight ; and, as she was the only lady, she was like to be undisturbed. The festivities were going off satisfactorily. There was nothing to which the most fastidious could take exception ; indeed, the spontaneous delight of the tenantry was as remarkable as touching. And to think that she, frail little brown woman, had done it all ! Her heart swelling with pride, she looked from the bridge by the mill over the grand domain, with

its temples, canals, spreading umbrageous woods ; and sighed with thankfulness. It was a splendid present from a maiden to a man, a royal gift. "Dear, dear Leo !" she murmured aloud. "He deserves it all, and, I hope, will be very happy." Idly plucking a bunch of leaves, she tossed them into the stream, and bent over the bridge to see them drift ; but perceiving two heads reflected in the water instead of one, she drew back with a great start, and said sharply, "I wish you would not frighten a body so ! "

Leoline, who was standing close behind, laughed slyly. " You blush, as if detected in a crime," he said. " Deserve it ? Not a bit. Yet I accept the present from you. I've caught you at last. Why do you avoid me ? If I enter by one door, you run out by another. Why ? "

What could she say ? How explain the extreme delicacy of her position ? How like a man to show so little tact ! If poets are so high in the clouds that they cannot see what passes on the earth, they ought to stop in ether, and not attempt to meddle with sublunary matters. Miss Rowe found it impossible to tell her old playmate why, so she looked embarrassed, and prepared to beat a retreat.

But Leoline, having caught her, seized both unwilling hands, and held them. " I know all, Abigel, my darling," he whispered ; " and I am so happy ! What have I done to have all that I desire—my

ancient name, the home of my ancestors, the darling of my heart for wife ? ”

The girl’s hands grew cold, as she tried to disengage herself. A chilling wave of desolation swept over the heart of Cy’s affianced, and she could scarcely breathe. Her whole being seemed absorbed in the one anguished yearning, “ Oh, that I had never come ! ”

“ Before I left town, the Princess told me of what I scarce dared to hope, and I told her my reasons for silence, and she said I was a booby for my pains. I told her how I had always loved my little Abigel, but that I never said so, having no fitting home to offer her, no money but what my mistress chose to give as largesse. I watched my darling delve and dig, and still held my tongue ; for if she had known that it was for her alone I cared to wear the title, she would have ceased to work for it. Women are so contrary ! But now it is won, and she hath bestowed it on me—to give it back to her again. Sometimes I feared that she liked somebody else better than poor me ; but the Princess assures me that it is otherwise, and so I claim you as my own—my very own—my darling, without so much as asking your consent ! ”

Leo tried to clasp her in his arms ; but Abigel, pale as a ghost, with gleaming eyes, tore herself away.

“ Oh, Leo ! ” she panted. “ How wicked of the Princess ! How unkind ! Why did I ever come ? ”

Leoline was disconcerted by the violence of the girl's emotion. Could the Princess have been mistaken? Did she not care for him, after all? "Speak the truth," he said, in his turn growing white, "alone together under the stars. If you cannot care for me, God's will be done. Without yourself, all that you have given me is valueless, of no more real worth than to the poor dead to whom you've given a name."

This was more than she felt called upon to bear. "You know," she said reproachfully, "that I'm the promised wife of Cy."

"Poor Cy!" Leo murmured sadly.

Poor Cy! 'Twas re-echoed in her own heart; for this revelation on the part of her playfellow had thrown her mind agog. Knowing that she was engaged to another, how wrong to make this confession! Too confused as yet to think clearly, she only knew that a harvest was being garnered of future regret and sorrow—of lifelong repining. If she had dared to suppose that Leo under enforced reserve could really love her—— But it was wicked of him to tell her now. She would hear no more, speak to him no more, and escape as soon as might be from the baleful influence, which she felt with horror that she was not strong enough to combat.

Quickly she moved along the path, despairing, on towards the house, longing for the privacy of her

chamber, where, locked in, she could give vent to her sorrow. “Poor Cy!” she thought. “He shall never, never know. That gruesome secret, at least, shall be for ever locked within my breast, all through life unto the end.” The end! To one so full of buoyancy how far away it seemed—the end—yet now in her new-born agony and terror she hungered for release! The future, which she had striven so hard to look at cheerfully, now, bereft of glamour, was appalling; and, as with repulsion she surveyed it in its new aspect, she felt an overwhelming pity for her cousin, in that it was no fault of his. Unhinged, sore troubled, she could not trust herself to speak with any one; a passing inanity of complaint would be an extra thrust under which she would possibly succumb. Solitude, nothing but solitude! A night of prayer and reason, and to-morrow she would come forth with a calm face, at least, though her soul should be rent asunder.

Noiselessly she sped along the path, followed slowly at a distance by the bewildered Leoline, who could not understand her conduct; and flitted up the steps to the terrace, bent on reaching her room by a back staircase allotted to the servants. Some one was standing in the hall, warming his feet before the fire. Cyrus himself! What brought him from the village, where he was staying with his fellows? He of all men on earth! She could not talk to him now. He

turned, and, as Leo had done, held out both his hands. Involuntarily she tendered hers, chill little hands like ice, and, standing benignly over her, he chafed them in his big palms.

"Poor Abby! my poor bird!" he whispered, with a strange compassion. "Does it hurt you so? I can be very sorry for you, feeling as I do myself."

Abigel looked up inquiringly, striving hard to control the trembling of her lips.

"Take it back, Abby; for 'twas too good for me. I should have known it, if I had not been a zany."

"Take back—what—Cy?" faltered Abigel.

"The love you promised me, my dear, and which was not yours to give."

"Cyrus," murmured the girl, "you won me loyally; and freely I give myself."

"Take my bird to keep it in a cage, where it will break its wings and batter its plumage? No. I was a presumptuous jackadandy even to dream that it was possible. I don't blame you for the pain; you could not help it, dear. Cribb warned me times out of number; but, wise in my own conceit, forsooth, I didn't choose to be convinced. But I know now——"

"What do you know?" whispered Abigel, her brain in a whirl. "I do love you, Cy, most dearly. How ungrateful I should be if I did not!"

"You love me through gratitude," sighed her cousin, gently. "With that I must be content. His

Royal Highness himself deigned to send for me, and told me what I should have known without the telling ; and I give it you back, my dear, more freely and frankly than you gave it.”

“ Right, my lad ! ” cried a cheery voice out of the gloom, from which emerged the burly form of Mr. Cribb. Seated in the shadow, Abigel had not perceived his presence. “ Right, my boy ! Do what’s right, and shame the devil. It’s well over, I say, as the woman said who hanged her husband. You both would have been sorry in the end, when it was too late ; and his Royal Highness has conferred another of many favours in occupying himself with your affairs. Come, come, my bonny lass ; you must not dim those bright eyes of yours with crying. We’ve had a deal too many tears of late. Don’t fret because you can’t have both the boys ! I expect you to dance with me to-morrow at the ball, unless I’m too old and ugly.”

Leoline appeared in the doorway, and seeing the group, stood there irresolute, till Cyrus beckoned him to approach.

“ Leo,” the latter said quietly—“ if I may be allowed once more to call your lordship by the old familiar name—she has worked hard to win for you this splendid present ; I now give you a yet more precious one. Go to him, Abby dear, and pray God he may make you happy ! ”

Cyrus placed his cousin, sobbing bitterly, in the arms of the amazed young lord, and, pushing the burly Cribb before him with scant ceremony, moved away with bowed head.

"That is a noble fellow!" Leo said presently. There was a moment of embarrassed silence. Then he whispered, "If you won't have Lord Northallerton, will you take the blacksmith's 'prentice?"

Abigel made no reply, but, leaning wearily upon his bosom, continued silently to weep. Without consent in words, she had in that self-same house accepted Cyrus; and now its new possessor was fain to take silence for consent.

CHAPTER XV.

UNEXPECTED NEWS.

THE projected ball which had exercised my lord Yarmouth's artistic accomplishments, and had set so many local female bosoms fluttering, never took place; for the gladness of the little knot of pleasure-seekers was doomed to be swallowed in the great wave of mourning which suddenly enveloped England. The very next day after the triumphal entry, a mounted courier came galloping up the neglected approach, dusty and travel-stained, a bearer of evil tidings. Where were my lords Yarmouth and Northallerton? There was awful news, terrible news, which had fallen on London like a thunderbolt! It must be broken to his Royal Highness gently, Lady Hertford said, for of all calamities that could have happened, it was the most grievous. "Merciful Heaven!" cried Lord Yarmouth, turning a shade less red; "what is it? The Prince is at his toilet, preparing to receive a deputation. News! Has the Princess of Wales returned to England?" No; worse

than that. The confinement of the Princess Charlotte was over, and after five hours' labour she was dead.

The guests who had come down to breakfast gathered in hushed groups, horror-stricken. She whose womanhood had dawned with such sunny promises after a childhood of thunder and rain, had been plucked away without warning. No one expected such an end. When parting from her father a few days before, she had said with her sweet smile, "I am the happiest woman in all this lovely world, for I have not a wish ungratified." And now she was gone. All that remained was lying under a mass of flowers, stiff and stark, beside a still-born son; while Leopold, crouching dry-eyed on a sofa, prayed for strength to bear. The blow, so utterly unexpected, fell with stunning effect. The scowling lower orders, forgetting private grievances, met their natural enemies upon common ground; the loss was national, and the whole nation mourned.

The Prince of Wales, who had of late received so many shocks, was bowed to the earth. Was nothing ever to go right with him any more? That autumn leaves should drop around and swirl about his feet was natural, but that this one bud of hope should be blasted to whom all parties looked; this tie of affection broken between himself and his people, which, through suspicion of his wife, he had chosen for so long to consider with an eye of jealousy—was too dreadful to

be realized at once. Racked by remorse and unavailing sorrow, he forgot Charlotte's little faults—her warm temper, obstinacy, brusqueness, tomboy manners, exuberant forwardness; and saw nothing but the bright young mother lying in an early grave. The brief gleam of happiness had improved her vastly, had softened the rough edges of her character; and when, as had been much the case of late, father and child were thrown together, the idea had struck him hazily that years hence, when he was no longer young, it might be well to have a warm-hearted, affectionate daughter to supervise his comforts. But that pleasant prospect was dashed, as, for him, all was shattered which bade fair to be agreeable. Caroline would not die, not she; she would live yet to plague him for half a century. Only t'other day a letter of hers had fallen into his hands, in which she wrote, “ Since de English won't give me de great honour of being Princesse de Galles, I will be Caroline, a happy, merry soul. The old Bégum, de Queen, is on her last legs, I hear; mais ça ne me fait ni froid ni chaud. There was a time when I should have been glad, but now noting in de world do I care for save to pass de time quickly.” Dear amiable creature! She received the news of Charlotte's tragic fate with perfect apathy, too much absorbed in the enjoyment of her eccentric freedom to heed such a trifle. But enough of the Dreadful Woman.

My lord Eldon, who had been wont to bully his young mistress, was present at Charlotte's death-bed, and was deeply moved by the kind hints thrown out whereby he was to know that she had forgiven his sallies. There were few others there ; for, by a curious chance, the members of the royal family were scattered to the winds of heaven. The Regent, we know, was in the country ; the Queen was at Bath ; Kent at Brussels ; Cambridge at Hanover ; *und so weiter*. And so the young thing started on her journey with none for whom she cared to wish her God-speed, except her distracted and bereaved husband.

Abigel grieved sincerely for her friend, and was drawn by the poignancy of present sorrow from the consideration of her private woes. In truth, she passed a painful night, and issued from her chamber trim and neat, but with, oh, such a gloomy visage ! Twisting and turning on her couch, she had endeavoured with all her strength of will to be satisfied with the aspect of affairs, to be pleased with her own behaviour. But it would not do ; and, after futile efforts to forget, she rose, depressed and feverish, and watched the growing dawn. Were people right who called her a coquetting flirt ? She had resolved to be so heroic, to link her arm within that of Cyrus and make him happy, to sweeten her matrimonial tea with a consciousness of virtuous abnegation. She was to be a willing sacrifice. Then had come the

interview with Leoline and his confession. Her impulse was to run away and hide, and tussle with Apollyon in a dark corner, and, winning a hard-earned victory, to tire her head and wash her face, and say nothing at all about it. That was her sturdy view of heroism and of duty. Cy should never know about that tussle in the dark corner. For him she was always to wear a smiling mask, however sore her heart; and time would soften the sharpness of the pain, and she would be able some day to sit calmly by her hearth with lines of silver in her raven hair, perfectly unruffled and content. A suspicion had crossed her mind from poor Charlotte's badinage that the Princess might some of these days air her match-making proclivities for her behoof, and had settled to her own satisfaction that she would marry Cyrus quickly—of course he would be only too delighted—to prevent distasteful meddling. But somehow the situation had come about quite differently from the way she had prepared herself to meet it. Leo had taken possession, as if there could be no doubt as to her own feelings; and when she revolted from that piece of ill-timed impudence, lo, Cyrus himself turned round and laid her on his rival's breast. The worst of it all was, that in her heart of hearts she was glad. But at the same time she was humiliated; for the inward monitor declared in accents which would be heard that she was playing *le rôle ridicule*, while Cy carried off the

honours. She had behaved like a coquette. This it was that rankled as she lay and tossed ; and she had resolved that she would summon courage to tell Leoline it might not be, and run away somewhere quite alone without any luggage. But, on emerging, resolute, from her chamber, she came face to face with Thomas.

The full-moon of Mr. Cribb was so radiant, he looked so pleased, that in her dissatisfied mood Miss Rowe could have boxed his ears with satisfaction. Papa Cribb was come to gloat over her false position, and glory in the emancipation of his boy. It was impertinent and cruel ! Jerking her chin, Abigel endeavoured to pass, but the Champion spread his broad form across the staircase.

“ All’s well that ends well,” he said. “ You two foolish young people have learnt to know your minds, thank Heaven. Do you really think you could have been happy serving the Fancy in a bar-parlour ? That’s what it would have come to. Cy has told me that you had at least the grace not to stand in his light.”

“ I intended to tell you so,” replied Abigel, with dignity. “ He shall pluck his laurels unopposed by me. In his wife you’ll never find an obstacle.”

Cribb shook his bullet head waggishly. “ I trust not, when he finds one. To make a marriage,” he

observed, with a gruff guffaw, "it requires two to say 'I will.' In a hysterical and high-flown state of mind, you'd be silly enough to say it, I've no doubt, and ready to bite your tongue out after ; but Cy will not. He ain't hysterical. With you by the altar rail he'll never say 'I will ;' thank the Lord, there's no longer any doubt of that."

Abigel had much ado to restrain her tears. Not only did Thomas gloat, but likewise gibe. It was vulgar and unmanly ; and she was making another effort to escape, when he took her hand and held it.

"Come, come," he said'; "don't be cross, but reasonable. Why are some girls so perverse that they fight and kick against what's best for 'em ? You're willing to sacrifice yourself when it isn't necessary, and be a martyr; well and good, and a monstrous captivating one, too. But why make a martyr of poor Cy? Does he deserve it? Do you think that by the light of his affection he would not learn to read your thoughts; and do you think that, seeing you morbidly unsatisfied and fretting, he would not be miserable? With everything favourable—fair wind, trim craft, new sails and cordage—folks find it hard enough to weather the matrimonial storm. If with everything sunshiny married people find it so difficult to get along straight and comfortable, surelie to start handicapped is a tempting of Providence !

If you don't choose to consider yourself, consider him, and think no more of what would be certain disaster to your cousin."

Abigel was crushed. How strange that in all her self-communings and dissections and examinations she had never seen the matter in this light! It had appeared so easy to make Cyrus happy, that she had never doubted her capacity in that direction if she chose to exert it. Her thoughts had always been directed to her own powers of endurance, not to his. The anchors were dragging, the bark was insecurely moored. With a new feeling of helplessness, she realized that as a pilot she was a failure. Like a child lost in a crowd, she looked about bewildered for some one to clutch. It had seemed so easy to set everything to rights. With the sweet superiority of the extremely young, who, knowing so little, think they know so much, she had always been ready to show the path to each; and now she was herself groping in the trackless forest. Whilst putting on a simple robe, she had rehearsed half an hour since what she would say to Leoline: how she would explain that she could never be his countess, the bride of a Plantagenet; that, born of the people, her lot must needs be lowly; that he must seek a mate among the nobly born. But somehow, when he appeared below presently, and mounted the stairs with a letter in his hand and deep concern upon his brow, and embraced her as if by

right, she had nothing to say, and was powerless to offer resistance ; and when he broke to his dear love, in tender tone, that the one cherished friend of her own sex was gone, never to be seen again, it was to him she turned for consolation.

* * * * *

In looking over a heap of rubbish which I have just turned out of a dusty drawer, I come upon three yellow printed snippings. All have reference to the noble art.

In the first I read that Caleb Rann, better known as the Pink of Bow, after a short and unsuccessful career—his internal organs diseased by body-punishers and a protracted course of excess—was taken into the workhouse infirmary of Marylebone ; and that there, in the spring of 1820, he succumbed, and, having donned his wooden waistcoat, was buried by the parish.

The second scrap is less lugubrious, and purports to be cut from the *Morning Herald* of the 18th of May, 1822. It reads thus : “ On Saturday, the Champion of England made his last bow to the amateurs at the Fives-courts. Cribb and the Sprig of Myrtle ascended the stage, the former decorated with the belt, and in the friendly set-to that followed, Tom showed himself as game as ever. Then the awful moment arrived when he had to say Farewell. He scratched his nob, and though his heart was full of gratitude, the *chaffer*

forsook its office. At length he stammered out with emotion, ‘ Gentlemen—I thank you sincerely for the favours you have conferred on me ; I do, indeed, and may your purses never fail you.’ Cribb now retired amidst a waving of handkerchiefs and hats ; and Cyrus Smalley, exceedingly agitated, addressed the public in these words : ‘ My lords and gentlemen—My dear old dad retires this day from public life—God bless him !—and leaves the belt open to be won. I have stood next to him for some time past, and mean to stand in his place till I am beat out of it.’ ”

The third fragment bears no date, but evidently once formed part of a weekly of Mr. Egan’s. “ In less than three years he has fought ten prize battles, and though still holding the belt, has fairly earned his rest. His friends and admirers, headed by the Duke of Beaufort, have bought the lease and goodwill of the Waterman’s Arms at Stangate, a slap-up lushing crib, frequented by the sporting world. Peers and costermongers, warm admirers all, will help to boil his pot, and over the social glass he will fight his victories o’er and o’er again.”

The last time I saw Cyrus Smalley was at Battle Magna, in the warm glow of midsummer. Hale and stout, and good-humoured as of yore, he was teaching a small boy, with blue eyes and golden locks, to assume the favourite Belcher attitude, while my lord and my lady Northallerton looked fondly on.

Leoline, with his arm round his wife's waist, was bestowing indiscriminate applause. "Brava!" he cried, laughing. "Brava, my plucky little Leo! Learn to use your fists betimes. 'Twould be better for me if I had done so instead of scribbling verses; for, indeed, your dear mamma is a terrible gray mare—an angel and a darling—but a tyrant!"

L'ENVOI.

I MAY possibly be accused by adherents of Queen Caroline (if any such really still exist) of indelicacy in raking up old scandals, of heinous wickedness in flinging mud at a departed and injured saint. I am willing calmly to bear the brunt of such accusations, having reason to be convinced that my portrait of the lady is like ; and feeling, moreover, assured that, party spirit and biassed rancour having had time to die, it is well that blame should lie at the right door. There are old people still living who mumble the truth now of the vanished martyr, and admit that George IV. was, to an unusual extent, a victim of circumstances.

It has given me much satisfaction to find—since this novel was written—the following passages in the autobiography of Prince Metternich, one of the shrewdest judges of character of his century, and a person who could look with regretful but quite unprejudiced eyes upon the proceedings in the British Laundry :—

“ June 16, 1820. Queen Caroline has arrived in

Dover, and was drawn by the hands of the people from Dover to Canterbury. This does not astonish me. A virtuous Queen, worthy of the Crown, would in all probability be bespattered with mud by the people; *she*, of course, must be drawn in triumph" (Metternich, vol. iii. p. 380).

"I gather that the shameful trial makes a shocking impression in England. *What would it be if people knew the circumstances more exactly?* No English mothers can allow their daughters to read the newspapers for a long time to come" (*Ibid.*, p. 384).

THE END.





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